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The Prologue from Ohrid

**Lives of Saints, Hymns,
Reflections and Homilies
for Every Day of the Year**



Saint Nikolai of Ohrid and Zhicha

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JANUARY

JANUARY - 1 -

1. THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

The eighth day following His birth, the Divine Child was presented in the Temple and circumcised according to the Law existing in Israel since the time of Abraham. On this occasion, He was given the name Jesus, which the Archangel Gabriel announced to the All-Holy Virgin Mary. The Old Testament circumcision was the proto-type of the New Testament baptism. The circumcision of our Lord shows that He received upon Himself the true body of man and not just seemingly, as was later taught of Him by heretics. Our Lord was also circumcised because He wanted to fulfill the entire Law which He Himself gave through the prophets and forefathers. In fulfilling the written Law, He replaced it with Baptism in His Holy Church as was proclaimed by the Apostle Paul: **"For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation"** (Galatians 6:15). (In the cycle of the liturgical calendar of the Church, this Feast of the Lord's Circumcision has neither a Forefeast nor an Antefeast).

2. SAINT BASIL THE GREAT, ARCHBISHOP OF CAESAREA

Basil was born during the reign of Emperor Constantine. While still unbaptized, Basil spent fifteen years in Athens where he studied philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy and all other secular sciences of that time. His colleagues at that time were Gregory the Theologian and Julian, later the apostate emperor. In his mature years he was baptized in the river Jordan along with Euvlios his former teacher. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia for almost ten years and completed his earthly life fifty years after his birth. He was a great defender of Orthodoxy, a great light of moral purity, a religious zealot, a great theological mind, a great builder and pillar of the Church of God.

Basil fully deserved the title "Great." In liturgical services, he is referred to as the "bee of the Church of Christ which brings honey to the faithful and with its stinger pricks the heretics." Numerous works of this Father of the Church are preserved; they include theological, apologetical, ascetical and canonical writings as well as the Holy and Divine Liturgy named after him. This Divine Liturgy is celebrated ten times throughout the year: the First of January, his feast day; on the eve of the Nativity of our Lord; on the eve of the Epiphany of our Lord; all Sundays of the Honorable Fast [Lenten Season], except Palm Sunday; on Great and Holy Thursday and on Great and Holy Saturday. St. Basil died peacefully on January 1, 379 A.D., and was translated into the Kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

You, Who, gave the Law to the world and to man,
You, the Law-giver, placed Yourself under the Law,
Others, you enjoined by impostition - Yourself, voluntarily.
That is why on the eighth day, in the flesh, You were circumcised.
In fulfilling the Law, with a new one You replaced it:
Circumcision of the flesh, was replaced with a spiritual one.
That impure passions we cut off from ourselves
And with a spirit pure, to gaze upon You.
That, with the spirit, the will of the body to cut and to constrict,
Your will, O Savior, by the spirit we fulfill it -
To this circumcision, the saints learned,
Their fiery example, to us, they left.
Wonderful Basil, to a glowing ray, similar,
To such circumcision, generations, he teaches.
To Basil, be glory, Your servant, great
Great, because of You, humble and constrained He became.
That is why he became great, and Great,
He remained.

REFLECTION

Why is it necessary to listen to the Church and not listen to one man who thinks against the Church, even though he might be called the greatest thinker? **Because** the Church was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ, and **because** the Church is guided under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. **Because** the Church represents the realm of the Holy, a grove of cultivated fruit trees. If one rises up against the realm of the Holy, it means that he is unholy and why then listen to him? "**The Church** is an enclosure," says the all-wise John Chrysostom. "If you are within, the wolf does not enter; but if you leave, the beasts will seize you. Do not distance yourself from the Church; there is nothing mightier than the Church. **The Church** is your hope. **The Church** is your salvation. **The Church** is higher than the heavens. **The Church** is harder than stone. **The Church** is wider than the world. **The Church** never grows old but always renews itself."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Circumcision of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. His glory in the heavenly kingdom where Cherubims serve Him in fear and in trembling;
2. His lowliness and His humility in the ritual of circumcision intended for sinners;
3. To contemplate my heart: how much have I circumcised sinful thoughts, vices and passions from it.

HOMILY

-About how we should depart from evil and do good-

"Turn from evil, and do good" (Psalm 34:15)

With these words are expressed all our effort by which we should labor here on earth and in the earth, i.e., on this material earth and in this physical body. Therefore, of what then should our labor consist? To achieve two habits: **First**, to avoid evil and **Second**, to do good. Concerning that which is good and that which is evil, our conscience tells us incompletely and unclearly because our conscience is darkened by sin; but the teaching of Christ tells us completely and clearly that which is good and that which is evil.

Brethren, what does our Lord ask of us? He asks, that as our altars are always facing the east, so should our souls also be turned toward good. To leave evil behind us; to leave evil in the shadow; to leave evil in the abyss of oblivion; to leave evil in the darkness of the past, that we, from year to year, from day to day, extend ourselves toward good: to think about good; to yearn for good; to speak about good; to do good. The Lord is seeking builders and not destroyers. For whoever builds good, with that alone, he destroys evil. However, he who turns away from destroying evil, quickly forgets how to build good and is transformed into an evildoer.

The apostle of Christ teaches us, "**Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good**" (**Romans 12:9**). Hate evil but do not hate the man who commits evil for he is sick. If you can, heal the sick person but do not kill him with your hatred. Adhere to good and only good; for good is from God; for God is the treasury of all good.

O Good and All-good Lord, teach us to avoid evil and to do good for the sake of Your glory and for the sake of our salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 2 -

1. SAINT SYLVESTER, BISHOP OF ROME

Sylvester was born in Rome and from his early youth was learned in worldly wisdom and in the Faith of Christ. He always conducted his life according to the Gospel commandments. He benefited much from the instruction of Timothy the priest whose death for the Faith Sylvester himself witnessed and, observing the example of the heroic sacrifice of his teacher, was imbued with such a spirit throughout his entire life. At age thirty, he became the Bishop of Rome. He amended the customs of Christians. For example, he dispensed the fast on Saturdays, which was practiced by many Christians up to that time, and ordered that fasting be observed only on Holy and Great Saturday as well as on those Saturdays that fall within the fasting seasons. By his prayers and miracles Sylvester assisted in bringing Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena into the True Faith. They were later baptized. He participated with the Empress Helena in finding the Honorable Cross. He governed the Church of God for twenty years. His earthly life ended honorably and he was translated into the heavenly Kingdom.

2. THE VENERABLE SERAPHIM OF SAROV

Seraphim was one of the greatest Russian ascetics, discerners and miracle-workers. He was born in 1759 A.D and died in 1833 A.D. Seraphim was distinguished by great humility. When the entire world praised him, he referred to himself as "the wretched Seraphim."

3. SAINT THEODOTA

Theodota was the mother of the brothers Cosmas and Damian, the Unmercenaries and Miracle-workers. Theodota lived a God-pleasing life and in such a life she instructed her sons.

4. THE VENERABLE AMMON

Ammon was a great ascetic of the fifth century. He was the abbot of the Tabennesiote Monastery in Upper Egypt. Three thousand monks lived the ascetical life under his direction. He possessed the abundant gift of miracle-working and discernment. Once when a monk asked him for advice, he said to him, "Be like a convict in prison, as he continually asks: when will the judge come, and so should you ask with trembling."

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SYLVESTER

O Lord, most wonderful, wonderful in Your saints, You are,
Mighty and Merciful, through Your saints, You appear.
As the sun through the stars, You shine through Your saints,
To the humble You give strength; To Paradise You raise them.
To the simple You impart wisdom; through them the wise, You shame,
To the unfortunate; you comfort with kindness; with heaven, You nourish the hungry.
Saints of every type, You have,
Among the saints, from every age, You receive
From every age and from every stock,
Without caste, without mark: the last or the first.
Pure from sin and, in good, fruitful,
Noble souls, kindred to Your Christ,
You call them saints. Everyone You call
To be a saint. Those who respond, You cleanse,
Wash them from sins that white as wool they become,
In such as these, all heaven rejoices with You,
Sylvester was such a one; In him You rejoice, and
Because of him, blessing You impart to us.

REFLECTION

How do you respond to those who say that Christ the Miracle-worker cannot fit in our logic? Simply reply: You fit into His logic. In His logic, all eternity fits and all the nobleness of time and, then, if you wish, a place will be found even for you. If a barrel cannot fit into a thimble, you can fit a thimble into a barrel. Blessed Clement of Alexandria says; "Philosophers are children until they become men through Christ. For truth is never thinking only." Christ came to correct man and, therefore, men's logic. He is our Logos and our Logic. That is why we must direct our reason toward Him and not Him toward our reason. He is the corrector of our reason. The sun is not regulated according to our clock, but our clock is regulated according to the sun.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Divine Word [The Logos]:

1. How the Triune God created everything by His Word, i.e., by Christ the Lord;
2. How senseless is every man, who distances himself from Christ, the Word of God, and in whom there is no Christ.

HOMILY

-About pride-

"Pride goes before disaster, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

Of all that exists on the four corners of the earth, what, O mortal man, can make us proud except stupidities and demonic illusions. Did we not enter into the world naked and wretched and are we not going to depart this world in the same manner? Everything that we have, did we not borrow it; and by our death, are we not going to return everything? Oh, how many times has this been said and overheard? The wise apostle says, "**For we have brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it**" (I Timothy 6:7). And, when we offer sacrifice to God of ordinary bread and wine, we say, "**Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee**" (Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom). For nothing that we have in this world is ours: not even a crumb of bread nor a drop of wine; nothing that is not of God. In truth, pride is the daughter of stupidity, the daughter of a darkened mind, born of evil ties with the demons.

Pride is a broad window through which all of our merits and good works evaporate. Nothing makes us so empty before men and so unworthy before God as does pride. When the Lord is not proud, why should we be proud? Who has more reason to be proud than the Lord, Who created the world and Who sustains it by His power? And behold, He humbles himself as a servant, a servant to the whole world: a servant even to the death, to the death on the Cross!

O humble Lord, burn up within our hearts the devil's sowing of pride with the fire of Your Holy Spirit, and plant within it the noble sowing of humility and meekness.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PROPHET MALACHI

Malachi was the last of the prophets in time. He was born after the return of the Hebrews from the Babylonian Captivity in 538 B.C. He was unusually handsome in countenance. According to legend, the people called him an angel, perhaps because of his external beauty or because of his spiritual purity, or even, perhaps because of his association with an angel of God. On many occasions he spoke face to face with an angel. When this occurred, others heard the voice of an angel; but they were not worthy to see the face of the angel. That which the angel proclaimed, the young Malachi prophesied. He cried out against ungrateful Israel and against the lawless priests. Five hundred years before Christ, Malachi clearly prophesied the coming and the mission of John the Baptist: "**Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me**" (Malachi 3:7). Mainly, he is the prophet of the day of the Dreadful Judgment. "**Before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day**" (Malachi 3: 23-24). He presented himself to the Lord while still young. Following him, there were no more prophets in Israel until John the Baptist.

2. THE PRIEST-MARTYR GORDIUS

Gordius was born in Caesarea of Cappadocia. He was an officer in the Roman army during the reign of Emperor Licinius. When a terrible persecution of the Christians broke out, Gordius left the army and his rank and withdrew to the wilderness of Sinai. Alone on Mount Horeb, Gordius spent his time in prayer and contemplation on the mysteries of heaven and earth. He especially contemplated on vanity and the worthlessness of all over which men strive and fight for on earth, and, finally, he wished to die and to be translated into the eternal and incorruptible life. With this desire he descended into the town at the time of certain pagan races and games. Gordius presented himself to the mayor of that town, declaring that he was a Christian. In vain did the mayor of the town try, through flatteries and threats, to dissuade him from the Faith. Gordius remained unwavering and firm as a diamond, saying: "Is it not sheer folly to purchase with this short-lived life, a life of eternal torment and spiritual death." Being condemned to death, he joyfully hurried to the scaffold and along the way spoke to the executioners about the glorious and sweet teachings of Christ. With the name of Christ on his lips Gordius offered his young body to the sword and his righteous soul to God in the year 320 A.D.

3. SAINT GENEVIEVE

Genevieve is the Patroness of the city of Paris. Through fasting, prayer and almsgiving she was made worthy of the Kingdom of God and died on January 3, 512 A.D., in the eighty-ninth year of her life.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROPHET MALACHI

Malachi proclaims what the angel tells him:
The day, the day, O the day is coming! The day which like an oven is blazing.
Who will endure it? Who will survive it?
Who, with their justice, before the Judge will stand?
All non-believers as a dry stubble will be
Food for the hungry fire. Weeping, sighing and shrieking!
The fire overflows and as a river flows,
Here what can the tongue of a sinner say?
O, my priests, you, who do not render Me praise,
Why do not your tongues the glory of the Lord sing?
Everywhere, among the people, you have become despised,
For My judgment, law and miracles you scorn.
I, the Lord am speaking, the Lord of hosts,
O, of those odious sorcerers, the judgment severe!
The fire when it charges, the smoke and the dreadful rumble it chases
Then, the hand of the Lord does not caress anymore.
Repent, O people, while days you have left,
Return to Me and I will return to you.
I the Lord am speaking, the Lord of hosts,
Return to Me and I will return to you.
Malachi proclaims what the angel tells him:
The day, the day, O the day is coming!
The day which like an oven is blazing.

REFLECTION

God permits humiliation and ruin to befall a proud man when he thinks that his strength is secured forever. When the pernicious Roman Eparch [Governor] Tarquinius beheaded Blessed Timothy, he summoned St. Sylvester and threatened him with death if he did not reveal Timothy's inheritance and in addition immediately offer sacrifice to the idols. Without fear and trembling, this discerning saint responded to the eparch with the Evangelical words: **"You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you" (St. Luke 12:20)**, "and that with which you boast that you will bring to me (i.e. death) will occur to you." The proud eparch shackled Sylvester in chains and threw him into a dungeon intending to kill him shortly. Having done this, the eparch sat down to eat lunch, but a fish bone caught in his throat. From noon to midnight, the physicians struggled to save his life but all was in vain. At midnight, Tarquinius gave up his proud soul in greatest torments. And so the prophecy of St. Sylvester was fulfilled, as also were the Biblical words: **"Pride goes before disaster" (Proverbs 16:18)**.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Guardian Angel:

1. How he stands at my right side upholding me in everything until I depart from the law of God;
2. How I have offended him on numerous occasions and how I drove him away from me transgressing the law of God.

HOMILY

-About how the Kingdom of God is gained with the heart and not with the tongue-

"Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (St. Matthew 7:21).

Brethren, one does not gain the Kingdom of God with the tongue, but with the heart. The heart is the treasury of those riches by which the kingdom is purchased; the heart and not the tongue! If the treasury is full with the riches of God, i.e., a strong faith, good hope, vivid love and good deeds, then the messenger of those riches, the tongue, is faithful and pleasant. If the treasury is void of all those riches, then its messenger [the tongue] is false and impudent. The kind of heart, the kind of words. The kind of heart, the kind of deeds. All, all depends on the heart.

Hypocrisy is helpless before men, and is even more helpless before God. **"If then I am a father,"** says the Lord through the Prophet Malachi, **"If then I am a father where is the honor due to me?" And If I am a master, where is the reverence due to me?" (Malachi 1:6)**. That is, I hear you call me father, but I do not see you honoring me with your heart. I hear you call me master, but I do not see fear of me in your hearts.

Our prayer: **"Lord! Lord!"** is beautiful and beneficial only when it emerges from a prayerful heart. The Lord Himself commanded that we pray unceasingly, but not only with the tongue to be heard by men, but rather enclosed in the cell of the heart so that the Lord could hear and see us.

Lord, majestic and wonderful, deliver us from hypocrisy and pour Your fear into our hearts so that our hearts could stand continually upright in prayer before You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE ASSEMBLY [SYNAXSIS] OF THE SEVENTY HOLY APOSTLES

Besides the Twelve Greater Apostles, the Lord chose Seventy Lesser Apostles and sent them to preach the Gospel, **"After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place He intended to visit, He said to them, 'The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.' Go on your way: behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this household' " (St. Luke 10:1-5).** But, as Judas, one of the Twelve, fell away from the Lord, so it was with some of the Seventy who abandoned the Lord not with the intention of betrayal but because of human weakness and faintheartedness. **"As a result of this, many of His disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Him" (St. John 6:66).** As Judas' place was filled by another apostle, **"So they [The Apostles] proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed, 'You, Lord, Who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two You have chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place'. Then they gave lots to them, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was counted with the eleven apostles" (Acts of the Apostles 1:23-26);** so also were the places of these lesser apostles filled by others that were chosen. These Seventy Lesser Apostles labored at the same work as did the Twelve Great Apostles; they were co-workers with the Twelve in spreading and establishing the Church of God in the world. They endured many sufferings and malevolent acts from men and demons, but their strong faith and fervent love for the resurrected Lord made them victors over the world and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. EUSTATHIUS, ARCHBISHOP OF THE SERBS

Eustathius was born in the district of Budim of God-fearing parents. As a young man he was tonsured a monk in Zeta; then he entered a higher form of asceticism in the Monastery Hilendar [Mt. Athos]. In time, Eustathius became the abbot of Hilendar. As abbot, he was elected Bishop of Zeta and after a certain period of time was elected Archbishop of the Serbs. Eustathius was a man of great charity who governed Christ's flock with zeal and love. He died peacefully in the year 1279 A.D. In his old age he cried out before his death: "Into Your hands, O Lord I give my soul." His relics are interred under the flooring in the Church at the Patriarchate of Pech.

3. THE EUNUCH OF QUEEN CANDACE

The Apostle Philip baptized this black man, a eunuch. Following his baptism the eunuch returned to his home and began to preach Christ. He was the first Apostle of Faith among the blacks in Ethiopia. **"Then the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route. So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the Prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go and join up with the chariot.' Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the Prophet and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone instructs me?'"** So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him. This was the scripture passage he was reading: **"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will tell of his posterity? For his life is taken from earth."** Then the eunuch said to Philip in reply, **"I beg you, about whom is the prophet saying this? About himself, or about someone else?"** Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this scripture passage, he proclaimed Jesus to him. As they traveled along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, **"Look, there is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?"** Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but continued on his way rejoicing. Philip came to Azotus, and went about preaching the good news to all the towns until he reached Caesarea" (Acts of the Apostles 8: 26-40). The eunuch died a martyr and became worthy of the Kingdom of God.

4. THE VENERABLE MARTYR ONUPHRIUS OF HILENDAR MONASTERY [MOUNT ATHOS]

In his youth, Onuphrius became angry with his parents and declared before the Turks that he was going to convert to Islam. Immediately following that, he repented because of these words and went to Hilendar where he was tonsured a monk. Tormented by his conscience, Onuphrius decided for martyrdom. Because of his determination and with the blessing of his spiritual father, he departed for Trnovo, Bulgaria where he reported to the Turks, proclaimed himself a Christian, and ridiculed Muhammad. Because of that, Onuphrius was beheaded on January 4, 1818, in his thirty-second year. The body of this spiritual knight is not preserved for the Turks tossed it into the sea.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE SEVENTY HOLY APOSTLES

O knights of the Cross, sons of light,
You have not yet passed, O children of the future,
For you are not dead, as Christ is not,
But lives with life that never decays.
The Lord, You the Wreath-giver, beautifully crowned you
Because His Name, you loudly proclaimed
Before emperors and princes, before executioners terrible.
God, you served; but with torment, the world repaid You.
You walked after Christ, O bees of Christ!
The world you filled with honey; the vessels you filled!
Souls you alleviated; passions you calmed,
With Evangelical sweetness you sweetened life,
With the aroma of Christ, you censed the earth,
Salt, light and incense to the world, you were.
Seventy Companions, all with the same love,
As branches with the tree, with Christ, you were attached;
Seventy Stars, around the Sun - Christ,
And there, the angels are and the Virgin All-Pure,
There, unutterable delight, joy unseen,
Glorious victors of this transitory time.
Holy Apostles, glory and thanks be to you.
From your blood, justice blossomed.

REFLECTION

God hears the prayers of the just. This is clearly seen from the lives of Moses, Elijah, and the other Old Testament righteous ones and prophets as well as from the lives of the apostles and saints. While St. Genevieve, as a nun, lived a life of asceticism in Paris, it so happened that Attila with his savage Huns surrounded Paris. Fear and terror overcame the entire population of Paris who, at any moment, awaited the capture of the city by the enemy. Then, St. Genevieve called upon the people to fast and to pray to God and then the calamity will be averted. Many men and women responded to the call of this saint and began to fast and pray to God. Genevieve herself fasted the most and prayed most ardently to God. After a short while the enemy turned away from Paris without any visible reason and departed for another place. That which the sword of many sinners cannot do, the prayer of the righteous person can.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the richness of God's power, wisdom and love:

1. The richness of that power, wisdom and love is manifested in created nature;
2. The richness of that power, wisdom and love is revealed to the world through the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOMILY

-About the citizens of the other world-

"They do not belong to the world anymore than I belong to the world" (St. John 17:16).

Christ the Lord is not of this world rather only in the vesture of this world. That is the Commander [Christ] clad in the clothing of a slave to save the captive enslaved by sin, matter and Satan. As is the commander, so are his soldiers. Even they, according to the spirit, are not of this world: They are not captives but free, they are not slaves but masters; they are not corruptible but immortal; they are not fallen but are saved. Such are all those who Christ recruited and who tasted immortal life willingly, rejected the world and united themselves with Him and remained faithful to Him until the end of their lives on earth. Abba Moses said, "No one can enter the army of Christ if he were not totally as fire; if he does not abhor honors and comfort, if he does not sever all bodily desires; and if he does not keep all of God's commandments." Judas was recruited but he fell away and loved prison more than the royal court, slavery more than freedom, corruption more than immortality, and destruction more than salvation. But the other apostolic recruits, great and small, remained faithful to Him [Christ] to the end, achieved victory for which they are glorified on earth among men and in heaven among the angels. That is why they are glorified and blessed both on earth and in heaven. All who are glorified by the world perish with the world, but those who are glorified by Christ are saved by Christ. The glory of the world is death, but the glory of Christ is life, life eternal and without death.

O Immortal Lord, even though we are of the world according to the body and sin, recruit us into Your army, the army according to the spirit, power, wisdom and love which is not of this world. So, even when we die to the world, we may live in Your immortal kingdom with the angels, apostles and saints because of the love and prayers of Your holy apostles.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR THEOPEMPOS AND THE MARTYR THOENAS

When Diocletian began his persecution of the Christians, Theopempos, Bishop of Nicomedia, was among the first to suffer martyrdom for Christ. Theopempos was brought before the emperor who threatened him with punishment of death if he did not deny Christ. To that threat, the courageous bishop responded to the emperor: **"It stands written, 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body' (St. Luke 12:4), 'but cannot kill the soul' (St. Matthew 10:28). O Emperor, you have authority over my body; do with it what pleases you."** Theopempos was severely beaten, suffered from hunger and tortured in various ways. Finally, the emperor summoned a certain magician, Theonas by name, to outwit this godly man through magic. Theonas dissolved the most potent poison in water and gave it to Theopempos to drink. Theopempos traced the sign of the cross over the glass and drank the poison. Theonas, upon seeing that the poison had no effect on Theopempos, turned to the emperor and shouted, "I, too, am a Christian and bow down before the Crucified One." Both were sentenced to death in the year 298 A.D.; Theopempos was beheaded and Theonas was buried alive. They honorably suffered and became citizens of the Kingdom of Christ.

2. THE HOLY PROPHET MICAIAH [MICAH] THE FIRST

Micaiah [Micah] was a contemporary of the Prophet Elijah. He foretold the death of the pernicious King Ahab in battle against the Assyrians (**I Kings, Chapter 22, II Chronicles, Chapter 18**). Micaiah [Micah] prophesied everything orally and did not put anything down in writing. However the other Prophet Micah was the one who prophesied the birth of the Lord in Bethlehem. **"But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah; From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:1).** He also authored one of the prophetic books.

3. THE VENERABLE MOTHER SYNCLETICA

Syncletica was of Macedonian descent. She was educated in Alexandria. As a wealthy and distinguished maiden she had many suitors, but she rejected them all and fled from her parents' home to a convent. Undergoing the greatest of self-restraints, vigils and prayer, Syncletica lived to her eightieth year. Her counsels to the nuns have always been considered a true spiritual pearl, for this righteous one did not attain the heights of wisdom through books but through sufferings, pains, daily and nightly contemplation, and spiritual communication with the higher world of the Divine. With her soul, she took up habitation in that higher world in the year 350 A.D. Among other things, St. Syncletica was known to say, "If it is the season for fasting, do not dismiss fasting, allegedly because of illness for, behold, even those who do not fast, succumb to the same illness." She further spoke, "As when uncovered treasure is quickly seized, so it is with virtue; when it is made public becomes eclipsed and becomes lost."

4. THE VENERABLE APOLLINARIA

Apollinaria was the daughter of Anthemius, the regent of the adolescent Emperor Theodosius the Younger. She was the eldest daughter of Anthemius whose younger daughter was insane. Apollinaria, who did not wish to marry because in her heart she was betrothed to Christ, withdrew into the Egyptian wilderness. In men's attire and under the masculine name of Dorotheus, Apollinaria entered a monastery for men, where she lived an ascetical life, uplifting her spirit continuously toward God and burning with love toward her Creator. Someone advised the imperial regent Anthemius to send his insane daughter to the ascetics to have prayers said for her. According to the Providence of God, it so happened that the elder sister through the power of prayer healed her insane sister. Only when Apollinaria died was her secret revealed that she was not a man, but a woman. The valiant bravery of this holy virgin remained as an example and stimulus to many throughout the ages who contemplate their salvation. She died in the year 470 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS APOLLINARIA AND SYNCLETICA

These innocent virgins, for God and their souls,
Became faithful followers of Christ.
Pleasures, luxuries and laughter, they abandoned
To the angelic world, lifted up their souls;
In their bodies weak, lighted torches, they were,
Their souls, by the Holy Spirit, wonderfully illuminated,
For centuries shining and showing the way,
Rejoice in heaven, with angels holy.
Apollinaria and Syncletica
In your hearts, the Holy Spirit glows,
You, He strengthens; you, He leads and teaches,
He wedded you and betrothed you to Christ.
Pray for us, O wondrous ascetics,
Heroines brave; immortal virgins.

REFLECTION

Fruit, fruit, and only fruit does the Lord seek from every living tree, which is called man. Good fruit is a God-loving heart and an evil fruit is a self-loving heart. Everything else that a man possesses and enjoys - position, authority, honor, health, money and knowledge - are but the leaves on the tree. **"Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (St. Matthew 3:10).** Even the non-Christian peoples valued good deeds more than fine words. How much more must it be the rule for the followers of Christ. At a council of the Athenians, at which were present representatives of the Spartans, a certain elderly man moved from bench to bench, seeking a place to sit. The Athenians mocked him and did not relinquish a seat to him. When the old man approached the Spartans, everyone rose to their feet and offered him a seat. Upon seeing this, the Athenians, in eloquent terms praised the Spartans. To this, the Spartans replied:

"The Athenians know what is good but they do not do good." Whoever performs good deeds resembles the tree which brings forth good fruit for his householder. The source of goodness in man is a good, God-loving heart.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the perfection of Adam, the first man:

1. His closeness to God;
2. His strength, wisdom and beauty from God;
3. The voluntary submission of the whole of nature to the authority of the sinless Adam.

HOMILY

-About our helplessness without Christ the Lord-

"Because without me you can do nothing" (St. John 15:5).

Our Lord did not have the habit of speaking in terms of exaggeration. No words in this world are weighed more than His words. When He says that we can do nothing without Him, then that must be taken and understood literally. Here, He speaks of good and not of evil. We can do no type of good work without Christ, aside from Christ and contrary to Christ. He is the proprietor, the giver and the inspirer for all good. No type of good stands outside Him, likewise no type of evil is contained in Him. Our Lord said, **"I am the Vine, you are the branches" (St. John 15:5).** What can the branches do without the vine? Can they grow and bring forth fruit? No, they can do nothing but become firewood.

Man can think as hard as he wants, but he cannot conceive of one truthful good which is not in Christ and which does not stem from Christ. If someone were to say that he does good and humane works outside of Christ, you know that those, his works, are spoiled to the core and are corroded, be it from vanity or be it from hidden selfishness. Man, without Christ, is the same as branches without the vine. He Himself told us this. The vine is hidden and unseen, but the branches are seen. Nevertheless, the grapes on the branch and the branch itself depends on the vine. The vine of all-encompassing good grows from the heart of God the Father and is watered by the sweetness of the Holy Spirit. O Triune Lord God, have mercy on us and save us!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 6 -

1. THE EPIPHANY [THEOPHANY] OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

When our Lord reached thirty years from His physical birth, He began His teaching and salvific work. He Himself signified this "beginning of the beginning" by His baptism in the Jordan river. St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, "The beginning of the world - water; the beginning of the Good News - Jordan." At the time of the baptism of the Lord in water, that mystery was declared to the world: that mystery which was prophesied in the Old Testament; the mystery about which in ancient Egypt and India was only fabled; i.e., the mystery of the Divine Holy Trinity. **The Father** was revealed to the sense of hearing; **the Spirit** was revealed to the sense of sight, and in addition to these, **the Son** was revealed to the sense of touch. **The Father** uttered His witness about the Son, **the Son** was baptized in the water, and the **Holy Spirit** in the form of a dove hovered above the water. When John the Baptist witnessed and said about Christ, "**Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world**" (St. John 1:29), and when John immersed and baptized the Lord in the Jordan, the mission of Christ in the world and the path of our salvation was shown. That is to say: The Lord took upon Himself the sins of mankind and died under them [immersion] and became alive again [the coming out of the water]; and we must die as the old sinful man and become alive again as cleansed, renewed and regenerated. This is the Savior and this is the path of salvation. **The Feast of the Epiphany [Theophany in Greek]** is also called the **Feast of Illumination**. For us, the event in the Jordan river illuminates, by manifesting to us God as Trinity, consubstantial and undivided. That is one way. And, the second: everyone of us through baptism in water is illumined by this, that we become adopted by the Father of Lights through the merits of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY TRINITY

O, Holy Lord, holy in creating,
All that You create by Your Word, by Your Spirit You consecrate.
O, Mighty Lord, mighty in suffering,
For the world You walk to Your death; for the world, You resurrect.
Immortal Lord, in voice, we praise You;
Father, Son, Holy Spirit - God, have mercy on us!
The Father, Who appeared over Jordan as a Voice,
The Spirit, Who as a White Dove hovered,
The Son, Who by the Prophet John was baptized,
Three rays of light, one light shown,
The Trinity manifested, we praise You in voice:
Father, Son, Holy Spirit - God, have mercy on us!

REFLECTION

At one time, the fables of the heretics plagued the Church of God and now the Church is plagued by the fables of the apostates from God. By perseverance in the Faith, by diligence in prayer, by confession of the Faith and even martyrdom for the Faith, the Church remained undefeated until now. Only by these methods will these neo-plagues be defeated. The Church of God, the Vessel of Divine Truth will triumph in the end, "**The enemies are ruined completely forever**" (Psalm 9:7). Blessed Clement of Alexandria said about heretics who left the Church, "He who has fallen into heresy travels through an arid desert, abandoning the One True God. Alienated from God, he seeks water in dry places, he gathers barren fruit with his hands and enters into an uninhabited and thirsty land." This also can be said today about the many hypothecators and theoreticians who are led by their imaginations and not by the truth of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the event of the Baptism of the Lord:

1. His humble coming to the Jordan river unknown to all, except John;
2. His immersion in the water; the hovering of the Dove over Him; and the Voice from on High.

HOMILY

-About the mystery of [Heavenly] Divine Trinity-

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit and the water and the blood: and these three are together"(I John 5: 7-8).

When we read Holy Scripture, we should be alert to keep an eye on every word. To the rapid reader, for example, this distinction which the Evangelist draws between the Heavenly Trinity and the earthly trinity will not become apparent. Concerning the Heavenly Trinity, he says, **"And these three are one;"** and concerning the earthly trinity, he says, **"And these three are together."** There is an enormous difference between **"being one"** and **"being together."** The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are One, whereas the spirit, water and blood are only together and are not one. Even enemies could be together as one, but are not one. All the people on earth are together, but they are not one. Water and blood constitute the body and the spirit is the spirit. **"For the flesh has desires against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17).** However, they are not one, but they are still together. When man dies the union is broken apart and ceases to exist. Blood and water go to one side and the spirit goes to another side. Whereas the [Heavenly] Divine Trinity in the heavens not only are they together but they are also one.

There is also another trinity in the inner heaven of man which should be, not only a unity, but a oneness so that man could be blessed in this world and in the other world. That is the union of the mind, heart and will. As long as these three are only in togetherness, man will be at war with himself and with the Heavenly Trinity. However, when these three become one, so that neither one rules and that neither one is enslaved, then man becomes filled with **"the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7),** man's every word, every explanation, every fear and every sorrow. Then the small heaven in man begins to resemble that great heaven of God, and the **"image and likeness of God"** becomes apparent in man.

O Triune God, help us to resemble, at least, those who resemble You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 7 -

1. SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Because John's main role in his life was played out on the day of the Epiphany (Theophany), the Church from earliest times dedicated the day following Epiphany to his memory. To this feast is also linked the incident with the hand of the Forerunner. The Evangelist Luke desired to remove the body of John from Sebaste, where the great prophet was beheaded by Herod, to Antioch his place of birth. He succeeded though, in acquiring and translating only one hand which was preserved in Antioch until the tenth century after which it was transferred to Constantinople from where it disappeared during the time of the Turks.

Feasts of St. John are celebrated several times throughout the year, but this day, January 7, has the most **Svečara**. [That is, those Orthodox Serbs who honor St. John the Baptist as their **Krsna Slava** - Patron Saint. The Krsna Slava is the day that the Orthodox Serbs commemorate the baptism of their ancestors into Christianity]. Among the Gospel personalities who surround the Savior, John the Baptist occupies a totally unique place by the manner of his entry into the world as well as by the manner of his life in this world, by his role in baptizing people for repentance and for his baptizing the Messiah and, finally, by his tragic departure from this life. He was of such moral purity that, in truth, he could be called an angel [messenger] as Holy Scripture calls him rather than a mortal man. St. John differs from all other prophets especially in that he had that privilege of being able, with his hand, to show the world Him about Whom he prophesied.

It is said that every year on the feast of the saint, the bishop brought the hand of St. John before the people. Sometimes the hand appeared open and other times the hand appeared clenched. In the first case it signified a fruitful and bountiful year and, in the second case, it meant a year of unfruitfulness and famine.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ATHANASIUS

This martyr of Christ was a simple and poor man but rich in faith and wise through the Spirit of God. Once, unintentionally, Athanasius entered into a debate about the Faith with a certain Turk. The Turk was educated and adroit with words, but Athanasius endeavored with all his strength to emphasize and to establish the truth of and preference for the Christian Faith over Islam. After that, they departed. The next day Athanasius was summoned before the judge. This Turk stood there as his accuser. When the judge called upon Athanasius to deny the Faith of Christ, as he allegedly made known to his companions a day earlier and to embrace Islam, Athanasius cried out: "I would rather die a thousand deaths before I would renounce the Faith of Christ." For that he was condemned to death and beheaded in the year 1700 A.D. in Smyrna. His body was buried in the Church of St. Parasceve in the same city.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN THE FORERUNNER AND BAPTIST

Thirty years of fasting and silence!
This, not even the mountain beasts can endure.
The lion alleviates his hunger with the music of roaring,
And the tree rustles when the wind approaches
And, you do not rustle neither roar nor moan,
Neither your lament nor your song through the wilderness echoed!
Tell me, are you a man? What is your name?
Will you ever want to speak with someone?
Voice, voice, voice, I am the voice; but the Word of God, He is,
To the children of Israel, I was sent to cry out:
Repent, O people, behold, He comes,
Bring forth good fruit, each according to your strength.
Behold, behold He comes; O Wonder of Wonders,
In the midst of the water, from heaven, a hidden fire!
Behold, the Lamb of God, among the wolves, walks;
Wolves, your lupine temper, in the water, cleanse!
Thirty years of silence and fasting,
Of your body, what remains; except your voice?
Your withered body is but a shadow of your voice,
Which proclaims the news: Behold, God comes to us!
Your withered body, a reed; that Herod broke
But the voice continues, continues; no one to silence it.
Whose voice is that? From whom even the centuries tremble?
A hungry lion! No, No - a man of faith.

RELFECTION

St. Basil the Great said, "Man is not something visible." Just as a house resembles a house, so the outward man resembles the outward appearance of a man. To the house is given honor according to the one who dwells in the house; so it is to man according to the spirit that dwells in him. In the physical sense it is obvious that the house is not the master but just a house in which the master dwells, but in the spiritual sense it is obvious that the body is not the man but only the house in which the man dwells.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the departure of the Lord to the Mount of Temptation:

1. How, after His baptism, He immediately directs Himself to fasting and to prayer;
2. How to a baptized man, the devil creates intrigue, especially during the time of fasting and of prayer;
3. How He, meek as a lamb, yet decisively as the master rejects all the temptations of the devil.

HOMILY

-About submission to the Will of God-

"Your will be done, on earth as in heaven" (St. Matthew 6:10).

Blessed be John the Baptist, for he fulfilled the Good News before the arrival of the Good News! Going into the wilderness, he gave himself up completely to the will of God, both body and soul. The will of God was carried out in his body on earth as well as in the heaven of his soul. Neither hunger nor wild beasts did harm to his body throughout the many years that he spent in the wilderness. Neither was his soul harmed by despair because of loneliness, nor pride because of heavenly visions. He did not seek from man either bread or knowledge. God granted him everything that was necessary for him because he gave himself up completely to the will of God.

Neither did he direct his footsteps in the wilderness nor away from the wilderness. An invisible rudder from on high steered his life. For when it was necessary for him to depart the wilderness and go out to meet the Lord, it is said: **"The Word of God came to John" (St. Luke 3:2)**. As an innocent youth, in this manner John spoke simply about his communication with the powers of heaven: **"And I did not know Him [Christ] but the One Who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, He is the One Who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' Now I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God" (St. John 1: 33-34)**.

How tenderly and simply he speaks about heavenly things! How he is as awesome as a lion when he speaks out against the injustice of men, against Herod and Herodias! The lamb and the lion dwell in him together. Heaven is as close to him as a mother is to her child. The will of God is as accessible and clear to him as the angels in heaven.

O Lord, Most-wise, direct the lives of us sinners in the wilderness of this life according to Your will as You directed the life of St. John the Baptist.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 8 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS JULIAN AND BASILISSA

Julian and Basilissa were of noble and wealthy parents. United in marriage, they vowed to live chastely as brother and sister. They distributed all of their property to the poor and both were tonsured. Julian founded a monastery and Basilissa founded a convent. Julian had about ten-thousand monks and Basilissa about a thousand nuns. When a terrible persecution began under Diocletian, Basilissa implored God that none of her nuns would become frightened of the tortures and would not fall away from the Orthodox Faith. The Lord heard the prayers of His worthy handmaiden and, in the course of six months, received unto Himself all the nuns, one by one and finally their abbess Basilissa. Before her death, Basilissa had a vision of her sisters [nuns] from the other world. To her, all of them appeared to her radiant and joyful as angels of God and beckoned their spiritual mother to come to them as soon as possible. Unlike Basilissa's convent, Julian's monastery was set ablaze by the persecutors and Julian was inhumanly tortured and died from the most difficult sufferings. During his tortures, the Lord watched over him and strengthened him so that he heroically endured, preserved his Faith and glorified the Name of Christ. Beheaded along with Julian were Celsus and Maronilla, the son and wife of the tormentor Marcian, who witnessing Julian's heroism in suffering and torture, were themselves converted to the Faith of Christ. Also beheaded were twenty Roman soldiers; seven brothers from that town; the presbyter Anthony; and a certain Anastasius, whom Julian at the time of his torture, resurrected from the dead by prayer. All suffered honorably for Christ and became citizens of the heavenly kingdom about the year 313 A.D.

2. VENERABLE GEORGE THE CHOZIBITE

George lived an ascetical life in the seventh century in Choziba Monastery in Jericho on the road from Jerusalem, the monastery where the Venerable John Chozibite first led an ascetical life.

3. SAINT DOMNICA

During the reign of Emperor Theodosius, Domnica, unbaptized, came from Carthage to Constantinople with four other pagan maidens. Patriarch Macarius baptized them and gave his blessing to them to live as nuns. With great zeal, St. Domnica gave herself up to a life of asceticism and in that zeal did not waver until her death in extreme old age. She died in the Lord about 474 A.D. She was so enlightened by the Holy Spirit that she was able to discern events in the future and through prayer to work miracles.

4. SAINT GREGORY, BISHOP OF OHRID

Gregory was a devout teacher and shepherd of Christ's flock. He died in the year 1012 A.D. In one of the inscriptions in the Church of St. Sophia in Ohrid, he is referred to as "Gregory, the all-wise."

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS JULIAN AND BASILISSA

**Bound by marriage, more bound with Christ,
A spiritual union, a union more lasting.
In the Book of the Living, their names the Spirit wrote:
"Brother Julian and Sister Basilissa."
Forsook all and after Christ they followed,
And when the hour chimes, their lives they gave up
For the love of God, the love of the Triune sun,
Glory, they despised, all the glory of the world;
Themselves, they glorified with the love of God;
And a wonderful example to us, they left.
The treasure of the Church, adornment and honor:
The wonder-working blood of these martyrs, wondrous.**

REFLECTION

On one of the stones in the Church of St. Sophia, the following words were engraved: "Wash your sins, not only your face." Whoever entered this glorious church read this inscription and remembered that the Christian Faith requires of him moral purity: purity of the soul, purity of the heart and purity of the mind. Just as in the heart of man is concentrated the complete spiritual man, this is what the Lord also said, "**Blessed are the pure of heart**" (St. Matthew 5:8). Total external cleanliness does not help at all in gaining the kingdom of heaven. Oh, if only we would invest as much effort in washing ourselves from sins as we invest daily in washing our faces, then God would truly be seen in our hearts as though in a mirror!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the three temptations by which Satan tempted the Lord Jesus:

1. **Gluttony:** The temptation with bread;
2. **Vainglory:** Lifting Him above the Temple;
3. **Avarice:** Offering Him the possession of the entire world.

HOMILY

-About the needed caution for those who think that they are secure-

"Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall" (I Corinthians 10:12).

The apostle who gives such advice knew human nature perfectly and all its weakness. Day after day, this experience is confirmed: that as soon as man straightens up from the mud of sin, he then sways and falls again. As soon as he is cured of the sin of avarice, he falls into the vice of vainglory. **Or**, as soon as he extends his hand to help a poor man, pride then topples him to the other side. **Or**, as soon as he becomes accustomed to prayer, he then opens wide his mouth to degrade those who are not yet accustomed to prayer. **Or**, as soon as he felt that the Spirit of God is directing him to the path of salvation, he then immediately sets himself up as a teacher to the entire world until unfortunately by that he completely drives away the Spirit from within himself.

When the Lord foretold to His disciples that they would all deny Him and flee, then Peter confident in his stability cried out: "**Though all may have their faith in You shaken, mine will never be**" (St. Matthew 26:33). Discerning his very heart only and seeing him already fallen into self-conceit and pride, the Lord responded to him, "**This very night before the cock crows, you will deny Me three times**" (St. Matthew 26:34). And when such a fall happened to the apostle in the immediate proximity of the Lord, why would it not happen to us? This is why, brethren, when we rise and turn from a certain sin and stand erect, we should ascribe this to the power and mercy of God and not to ourselves and we should be very vigilant to protect ourselves and to implore God that we, again, do not fall, be it to one side or the other side, but walk on the upright path of the Lord.

O All-seeing Lord, help us to stand straight before You by the Spirit, and when we become erect, uphold us that we do not fall anymore.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 9 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR POLYEUCTUS

The Armenian city of Melitene was drenched with the blood of Christians as was the entire country of Armenia. The first blood shed for Christ in this city was that of Saint Polyeuctus in the year 259 A.D. during the reign of Valerian. In this city [Melitene] were two friends: both Nearchus and Polyeuctus were officers, Nearchus baptized and Polyeuctus unbaptized. When the command of the emperor was sent out concerning the persecution of the Christians, Nearchus prepared for death; but he was in great sorrow because he had not succeeded in converting his friend Polyeuctus to the True Faith. When Polyeuctus learned of the reason for Nearchus' sorrow, he promised to embrace the Faith. The following day Polyeuctus related his dream to Nearchus: the Lord Himself appeared to him in light, removed Polyeuctus' old clothes from him and dressed him in radiant new clothes and sat him in the saddle of a winged horse. After this, Polyeuctus went to town, shredded the emperor's decree concerning the torturing of Christians, and destroyed many statues of the idols. He was tortured and was condemned to death. When he was brought to the place of execution, he looked at Nearchus in the throng of people and joyfully cried out to him: "Save yourself my dear friend! Remember the vow of love confirmed between the two of us!" Later, Saint Nearchus died as a martyr for Christ by fire. The commemoration of the feast of St. Nearchus is April 22.

2. THE VENERABLE EUSTRATIUS

Eustratius was a native of Tarsus. He was a great ascetic and a man of prayer. During the seventy-five years he spent in the monastery, Eustratius never laid down to sleep on his left side but always on his right side. Throughout the Divine Services, from the beginning to the end, he repeated to himself: "Lord have mercy!" He died in his ninety-fifth year.

3. SAINT PHILIP, METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW

Philip was born February 11, 1507 A.D. Once, while standing in church as a young boy, he heard the priest read from the Gospel: "**No one can serve two masters**" (St. Matthew 6:24). He became very frightened by these words, as though these words were exclusively spoken to him and at that same time became enlightened by them. He then withdrew to the Solovetsk Monastery where he, after a long and difficult period of probation [Novitiate], was tonsured a monk. In time, Philip became the abbot and shone as the sun and the whole of Russia heard of him. Hence, Emperor Ivan the Terrible summoned Philip to fill the vacant Metropolitan See of Moscow in the year 1566 A.D. However, this holy man could not endure with indifference the awful atrocities of the terrible tsar and, therefore, counseled him and rebuked him without fear. The tsar found some false witnesses against Philip, ousted him from office, and ordered that he be dressed in a simple and tattered monastic cassock and imprisoned him in Tver on December 23, 1569 A.D. Malyuta Skuratov, one of the tsar's confidants, came to Philip's cell and suffocated him with a pillow. Shortly afterwards, all those who were opposed to Philip died evil deaths. After several years, the body of the saint discovered whole, incorrupt, and fragrant, was translated to the Monastery of Solovetsk.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS NEARCHUS AND POLYEUCTUS

Nearchus and Polyeuctus, soldiers of Caesar,
Became soldiers of the Heavenly King,
One baptized with water, the other by his blood,
The second surpassed the other and became the first.
Oh, blessed be this competition,
This heroic rushing to Christ's kingdom!
Polyeuctus rejected all by which the earth spoils
Everything, as a wind that comes; as the wind, passes,
And for these urgent sufferings, purchased the everlasting kingdom;
This trade, for him, turned out radiant:
For eternal life, let the grass be mowed!
For transitory suffering, eternal glory!
Pray for us, O soldier of Christ,
That, not one of your souls perish!

REFLECTION

The Orthodox Church by teaching men about perfect love, at the same time, also teaches them perfect obedience from which emanates order and harmony among the faithful. Bishops owe their obedience to the Lord. Priests owe their obedience to the bishops. The faithful owe their obedience to both [bishops and priests]. St. Ignatius writes about this: "You are required to obey without hypocrisy; he who would deceive his visible bishop would also scorn the Invisible [Christ]. I pray you, endeavor to fulfill everything in godly unanimity under the presidency of the bishops who occupy the place of Christ and the presbyters who constitute the assembly of the apostles, not thinking that whatever you do alone and apart would be correct."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate all the virtues in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ:

1. How every virtue in Him is complete and perfect as in no other in the history of the world;
2. How everything is wonderfully complimented, one in the other is developed and one in the other is made radiant.

HOMILY

-About the concern for the salvation of our neighbors-

"No one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor" (I Corinthians 10:24).

This is the principle of the saints of God, both now, at one time, always and forever. This is the principle on which society is built. Upon this principle can be established the most perfect, the most God-pleasing and the most prosperous human society. This is the saving principle for every type of difficulty with which contemporary men struggle, struggle without victory and without hope. The holy soul is concerned with **where** the homeless will spend the night, **how** the hungry will be fed, **how** the naked will be clothed. The soul is concerned and prays to God that their neighbors be saved; that their hearts be filled with love toward God; that their minds be directed toward God; that the wicked turn from the path of wickedness; that those wavering in the Faith be strengthened; that those who are strengthened be sustained; that those who have died see the Face of God; that the living be written in the Book of Life in the Kingdom of Light.

Therefore, be careful brethren, how even in like manner, word for word, can sound the destructive and antisocial principle of the devil. This principle of the devil says: no one should look at their own body to preserve it in purity from sin, but rather everyone should look at the bodies of others in order to ruin and to destroy them. That no one should look at his own soul, how to save it, rather everyone should look at the soul of someone else in order to blacken it, to curse it, to impoverish it and to destroy it. Let no one look at his house, in order to build it, and renew it rather let everyone look at the home of another in order to burn it and demolish it. No one should look at his granaries in order to fill them, rather, one should look at the granaries of others in order to steal from them and to empty them. See, brethren, how this principle can be either a principle of good or a principle of evil; a sharp two-edged sword; an angel or Satan. See how this principle in the satanic spirit and form has taken momentum on all sides today!

O Lord, Holy Spirit, Who has released these holy words in the world through the tongue of the apostle of God as bright rays of the sun to illuminate and not to burn us, help us now to fulfill them in the proper heavenly sense to the glory of the Triune God and for the salvation of our souls.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 10 -

1. SAINT GREGORY, BISHOP OF NYSSA

Gregory was the brother of Basil the Great. At first, he was only a presbyter since he was married; but when his wife Blessed Theosevia died, Gregory was chosen and consecrated as bishop of Nyssa. He was distinguished by his great secular learning and spiritual experience. He participated at the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 381 A.D). It is thought that he composed the second half of the Symbol of Faith [The Creed]. He was a great orator, an exegete of Holy Scripture and a theologian. Because of their defeat, the Arians especially attacked him as their worst enemy, so that, during the reign of Emperor Valens, their ally of the same mind, succeeded in ousting Gregory from the episcopal throne and banished him into exile. This Holy Father spent eight years in exile, patiently enduring all miseries and all humiliations. He finally died in old age toward the end of the fourth century and was translated into the Kingdom of God remaining on earth throughout the ages as a great beacon of the Church.

2. THE VENERABLE AMMON, EGYPTIAN ASCETIC

For fourteen years, Ammon prayed to God and struggled to conquer anger within himself. He attained such perfection of goodness, that he was not even conscious that evil existed in the world. He was particularly knowledgeable in Holy Scripture. He died at the beginning of the fifth century.

3. SAINT MARCIAN

Marcian was born in Rome. As a presbyter, he lived the remainder of his life in Constantinople during the greater part of the reign of Emperor Marcian and Empress Plucheria. Inheriting enormous wealth from his parents, Marcian generally spent it on two goals: either on building or restoring churches or on charity for the poor. He built two new churches in Constantinople, St. Anastasia and St. Irene, both famous for their beauty and sacredness. When he was asked, "Why do you spend so much on churches?" He replied, "If I had a daughter and wanted to marry her to a nobleman, would I not spend much gold in order to adorn her as a worthy bride? And, here I am adorning the Church, the Bride of Christ." As much as this wonderful man was generous toward the churches and the indigent; so much was he austere, very austere toward himself following the apostolic exhortation: **"If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that" (I Timothy 6:8)**. It is written about him: "He was totally in God and God in him, and presented himself to God in fullness of years and good works," in the year 471 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT GREGORY - SAINT MARCIAN

The Spirit possesses the gifts, the Spirit imparts the gifts,
To some, blessed mercy; to some, bold understanding,
To some, a special virgin's purity,
To some, a living love or a correct mind.
According to the strength of one's faith, a new gift, the Spirit adds:
If the faith grows, which moves mountains,
The treasury of the Spirit, then opened is
And, gift upon gift, as rain, descends upon the faithful one.
St. Gregory, because of his great faith,
To spiritual heights, like an eagle soared.
St. Marcian, because of his great faith,
With heavenly mercy was illuminated.
The light of theology, to Gregory was imparted.
To Marcian was given grace; the chrism of praising.
O Heavenly Spirit, Lord and King,
Your wondrous gifts, from us, do not withhold,
But through the prayers of Your chosen vessels
In the day of the Dreadful Judgment, from condemnation, save us.

REFLECTION

Vanity because of clothing occupies special momentum in our time. He who has nothing else of which to be proud becomes proud of his attire. He who would have something more costly than clothes of which to be proud, does he not become proud? Just as gold, which does not come out from the surface of the earth, so it is that neither the spiritual values of a man not show outwardly. It is said, that a certain distinguished philosopher saw a young man who displayed pride in his clothing. He approached the young man and whispered in his ear: "The same fleece was previously worn by a ram, but, nevertheless, he was still a ram!" To be a Christian and to display pride in clothing is more insane than to be an emperor and to be proud of the dust under his feet. While St. Arsenius wore cloth of gold in the royal court, no one called him great. He was called **Great** only then when he unselfishly gave himself over completely to God and dressed in rags.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the lowliness of the Lord Jesus:

1. The lowliness of the King Who was born in a cave;
2. The lowliness of the most wealthy One, Who hungered and thirsted;
3. The lowliness of the Almighty in relationship with the lowly on earth.

HOMILY

-About contentment with that which is most necessary to us-

"If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that" (I Timothy 6:8).

The apostles of God taught others that which they themselves fulfilled in their own lives. When they had food and clothing they were content. Even when it occurred that they had neither food nor clothing they were content. For their contentment did not emanate from the outside but emanated from within. Their contentment was not so cheap as the contentment of an animal, but costly, more costly and more rare. Internal contentment, the contentment of peace and love of God in the heart, that is the contentment of greater men, that was the apostolic contentment. In great battles, generals are dressed and fed as ordinary soldiers and they do not seek contentment in food nor in clothes but in victory. Victory is the primary principle of contentment of those who battle. Brethren, Christians are constantly in battle, in battle for the victory of the spirit over the material, in battle for conquest of the higher over the lower, man over beast. Is it not, therefore, absurd to engage in battle and not to worry about victory but to concern oneself with external decorations and ornaments? Is it not foolish to give to one's enemies the marks of identification? Our invisible enemy [Satan] rejoices at our vanity and supports us in every vain thought. The invisible enemy occupies us with every possible unreasonable pettiness and idleness only to impose upon our minds the heavy forgetfulness relative to that for which we are here on earth. The invisible enemy [Satan] presents to us the worthless as important, the irrelevant as essential and that which is detrimental as beneficial only in order to achieve victory and to destroy us forever.

O Lord, Holy, Mighty and Immortal, Who created us from the mud and breathed a living soul into mud, do not allow, O Lord, that the mud overwhelms! Help our spirit that it always be stronger than the earth.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 11 -

1. VENERABLE THEODOSIUS THE GREAT [THE CENOBIARCH]

Theodosius was the first founder and organizer of the cenobitic way of monastic life. He was born in the province of Cappadocia in the village of Mogarissus of devout parents. As a child, he visited St. Simeon the Stylite who blessed him and prophesied great and spiritual honors about him. With a thurible [censer] in which he placed unburned charcoal and incense, Theodosius sought out a place where he could settle and establish his monastery and stopped when the charcoal fired up on its own. Here, he settled and began to live the ascetical life. Soon, he gathered around him many monks of various nationalities. He built a church for each nationality so that, at the same time, services and hymns were offered to God in Greek, Armenian, Georgian, etc. But, on the day of Holy Communion, all the brotherhood gathered in the great church in which the Greek language was used. There was a communal table for all, communal property, communal penance, communal labor, communal patience and, not too rare, communal hunger. Theodosius was an exalted model of life to all the monks; an example in labor, prayer, fasting, watchfulness and in all Christian virtues. God granted him the gift of working miracles by which he was able to heal the sick, to appear from a distance, to tame wild beasts, to discern the future and to cause bread and wheat to multiply. Prayer was on his lips day and night. He died peacefully in the Lord in the year 529 A.D., the one-hundred fifth year after his birth.

2. BLESSED MICHAEL, A FOOL FOR CHRIST

Blessed Michael was a Russian of a princely family. He made himself appear foolish so as to conceal his virtues from the world and to avoid the praise of men. Thus, he prepared himself for praise before God. He died in the year 1453 A.D. in the Klops Monastery near Novgorod where his relics repose.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THEODOSIUS

Those who with fear stand before God,
Those who fear the Living God only,
Only they can witness
That the righteous one receives that for which he prays to God.
By true prayer, God does for people -
The dawn glows to the one who turns to the dawn.
Saint Theodosius, by his prayers
Helped many and also helped us.
For he lives even now as he once did
And works miracles, as he once did and does now -
The Lord bestowed upon him power, because of his faith,
And love for God; love immeasurable.
Wonderful Theodosius, zealot of truth,
Wondrous organizer of the monastic life,
Let him be praised by us, who is glorified by God,
Now a glorious citizen of the Kingdom of Christ

REFLECTION

To be bribable means to be not a Christian. The Orthodox Fathers of the Church were not given to bribery nor to be intimidation. Bribery in matters of the Faith is equal to Judas's betrayal of Christ for money. Such bribery was characteristic only of certain heretics. When Emperor Anastasius succumbed to the heresy of Euthychius, Emperor Anastasius rose up against the decisions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451 A.D) and wanted to outlaw those decisions. In order to win over the most distinguished representatives of the Church for himself, the emperor began to send them various gifts. St. Theodosius, by his fame, was the first in all of Palestine. The emperor sent him thirty liters of gold as a gift, supposedly for the needs of the monastery. By this, Theodosius immediately understood that the emperor wanted to bribe him. How wisely this saint of God acted! He did not want to keep the money for the monastery even though it was in great need; neither did he want to return it to the emperor so that the emperor would not become more embittered against Orthodoxy; thus he immediately distributed all the gold to the poor in the emperor's name. This charity strengthened his prayer to God for the correction of the emperor and return to the true path.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the weeping of the Lord Jesus:

1. The weeping and sorrow over the lifeless Lazarus as well as over the fate of Jerusalem;
2. The weeping and sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane because of man's bondage to sin, to the demon and to death.

HOMILY

-About the progressive growth in spiritual development-

"Everyone who lives on milk lacks experience of the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties are trained by practice to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:13-14).

Those who feed on the food of the milk of sensual reflection cannot easily distinguish between good and evil. They usually come to the conclusion that all Faiths are equally the same in value; that sin is the indispensable shadow of virtue; that evil, in general, is the unavoidable companion of good. **A true Christian** cannot come to such erroneous conclusions. **A true Christian** is a mature person who is not fed of milk, one who is distrustful of the senses, one who judges much finer and makes a finer distinction between the values of all that is and all that was. To the Christian, indeed, is given clear distinction of God's Revelation for distinguishing good from evil; nevertheless, for him [the Christian] a long and laborious study is necessary in order that he, as being perfect, could in every given case know what is good and what is evil. This knowledge should pass over into feeling in order to be trustworthy and without error. Both good and evil wish to touch the heart of man. That is why man should be trained, with his feeling in the heart, to immediately recognize what approaches him in the same manner, as with his tongue he immediately senses the salty and the unsalty, the sweet and the bitter.

Brethren, let us endeavor every day and every moment to sharpen our heart that the heart could always distinguish good and evil. For everything that happens to us, the question is posed: What is good and what is evil? Precisely everything that happens to us, happens to us so that we could realize what is good and to follow after good. We place ourselves in such temptations even a hundred times a day. He who has eyes to see, let him see.

O Lord, Lover of mankind, warm our hearts with good which is from You. Make us wise, O Lord, to be able to distinguish good from evil. O Master, strengthen us that we should always embrace good and discard evil for the sake of Your glory, O Lover of mankind, and for the sake of our salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR TATIANA

Tatiana was a Roman whose parents were of great nobility. She was a Christian and a deaconess in the church. After the death of Emperor Heliogabalus, Emperor Alexander, whose mother Mammaea was a Christian, reigned in Rome. The emperor himself was wavering and indecisive in the Faith for he kept statues of Christ, Apollo, Abraham and Orpheus in his palace. His chief assistants persecuted the Christians without the emperor's orders. When they brought out the virgin Tatiana for torture, she prayed to God for her torturers. And behold, their eyes were opened and they saw four angels around the martyr. Seeing this, eight of them believed in Christ for which they also were tortured and slain. The tormentors continued to torture St. Tatiana. They whipped her, cut off parts of her body; they scraped her with irons. So all disfigured and bloody, Tatiana was thrown into the dungeon that evening so that the next day, they could, again, begin anew with different tortures. But God sent His angels to the dungeon to encourage her and to heal her wounds so that, each morning, Tatiana appeared before the torturers completely healed. They threw her before a lion, but the lion endeared himself to her and did her no harm. They cut off her hair, thinking, according to their pagan reasoning, that some sorcery or some magical power was concealed in her hair. Finally, Tatiana along with her father were both beheaded. Thus, Tatiana ended her earthly life about the year 225 A.D., and this heroic virgin, who had the fragile body of a woman but a robust and valiant spirit, was crowned with the immortal wreath of glory.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR PETER APSELAMUS

Peter was born in Eleutheropolis in Palestine. In his youth, Peter suffered for the Faith of Christ in 311 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Maximian. After much torture, he was condemned to death. Upon hearing his death sentence, he rejoicefully cried out: "That is my one wish; to die for my God!" Peter was crucified in the same manner as our Lord Himself and expired on the cross.

3. THE FEAST OF THE ICON OF OUR LADY NURSING THE CHRIST CHILD [MLEKOPITATELNICA]

This is the name of the icon of the All-Holy Mother of God which the Serbian Saint Sava [Sabas] brought from the Monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified, near Jerusalem. And so, the prophecy spoken of by St. Sabas the Sanctified, some eight-hundred years earlier, that a certain Serbian priest by the name of Sava [Sabas] will come and that this icon and his crozier (staff) be given to him, was fulfilled. When St. Sava the Serbian visited the Monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified, the monks recalled the prophecy of the founder of their monastery and gave to Sava the Serbian this icon and crozier. This icon [Mlekopitatehnica] was placed on the right side of the Royal Doors on the iconostasis, in Sava's hermitage [Isposnica-House of Silence] in Karayes [Mt. Athos] and the crosier placed in an adjacent cell known as the "Paterica".

4. THE VENERABLE MOTHER THEODORA

Theodora was a glorious nun and teacher of the nuns from Alexandria. "Just as trees require winter and snow in order to bear fruit, so trials and temptations are needed for our life," spoke this holy woman. She died peacefully at the beginning of the fifth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TATIANA

You grieve over the youth of your body, Oh, be reasonable!
Youth which passes, is it worthwhile to grieve over; you judge!
There is only one youth, youth in eternity,
That is the true youth, youth without aging,
This is worthwhile to ask for, and for it, to shed tears,
Even if you have to pay for it with the death of the body.
Tatiana purchased the costly with the less costly.
For dust and water, the Divine wine;
For the body that ages, eternal youth
And for a few tears, Cherubic joy.
Betrothed to Christ, the Immortal King,
She remained faithful to her Betrothed;
By the power of a pure spirit, crushed temptations
And bravely endured frightening tortures.
Around her were heard angelic footsteps;
As a wrinkled cloth, her body she shed,
And a soul free of earthly ties
Was raised to the wedding feast in the Kingdom without tears.

REFLECTION

There is no greater honor or greater calling on earth than to be a Christian. When the judge-torturer Sevirus asked the young Peter Apselamus, "Of what lineage are you?" Peter replied, "I am a Christian." The judge further inquired of him, "In what rank are you?" To that Peter responded, "There is no greater nor better rank than to be a Christian." Father John Kronstadt writes: "The whole world is but a cobweb in comparison to the Christian human soul." The Christian is an earthen vessel into which is poured divine power and light. Will this vessel be placed on the golden royal throne or will it be lowered in the dark hut of the beggar; by this, his value will neither be magnified nor diminished. Does not gold have the same value whether it is wrapped in a silk handkerchief or in a cabbage leaf?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the meekness of the Lord Jesus:

1. His meekness about His hidden life in Nazareth until the age of thirty;
2. His meekness in dealing with the sick and with the sinners;
3. His meekness in dealing with Judas the traitor and with the unjust judges.

HOMILY

-About how man is most dear to God and God to man-

"For I want not what is yours, but you" (I Corinthians 12:14).

With these words, which could have only been spoken by the fiery apostolic love toward one's neighbor, is expressed the essence of the relationship of the Christian toward God and God toward the Christian.

The love of God could very well say:

"You, O Christian, fast for My sake; for My sake you distribute alms; for My sake you lift up heartfelt prayers; for My sake you build churches; for My sake you offer sacrifices and you perform many other good deeds. All of this is good, and all of this is pleasing to Me, but you are more precious to Me than all of this. In the end, I seek nothing of all of this rather, I seek you, only you."

The love of a Christian could very well say:

"O Lord, You gave me health and that is good. You turn on the light; You permit the rain to fall; You refresh the air by Your thunder and that is good. You bestow wealth, wisdom, many years, offspring and many other good things which You bountifully place on the table of this life. All of this is good and overly-good. I receive all of this with gratitude. But, in the ultimate end, that is only the hem of Your garment. Ultimately, I do not seek anything of that but You, O Lord, You alone I seek."

O my brethren, that is not God which is seen with the physical eyes, neither is that man which is seen with the physical eyes. That which is seen in the whole of nature is only something of God; and that which is seen in the physical garment is only something of man. Brethren, God is Love which heaven lowers to earth; Brethren, man is love which raises earth to heaven.

O Lord, Lover of mankind, Creator and Almighty, take up Your abode more and even more in us with Your Life-giving Spirit that we may live; that we may be alive in Your kingdom without death.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 13 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS HERMYLAS AND STRATONICUS

The Emperor Licinius raised up a persecution against Christians. St. Hermylas, a Christian and a deacon in the Church, was captured and led to court. When Hermylas was informed that he was being led away to be tortured, he greatly rejoiced. In vain did the emperor threaten him. Hermylas openly confessed his faith in Christ and responded to all the threats of the emperor saying, "**The Lord is with me; I fear not; What can man do against me?**" (Psalm 118:6). Following excruciating tortures, Hermylas was thrown into the dungeon. The guard was Stratonicus, secretly a Christian, who sympathized with the suffering of Hermylas with all his heart. When it was reported to the emperor that Stratonicus was also a Christian, the emperor ordered that both of them be drowned in the Danube river. After that, the executioners tied Hermylas and Stratonicus in a net and both were drowned in the Danube. Three days later, their bodies were washed ashore. Christians discovered their bodies and buried them about eighteen miles from Belgrade. These glorious martyrs suffered for Christ and were glorified in the year 315 A.D.

2. SAINT JAMES, BISHOP OF NISIBIS

As a hermit, James lived in an open field in the summer and in winter he lived in a cave. On one occasion, he went down to the town of Nisibis to see how the Christian Faith was prospering and to see how Christians live. There, he was elected bishop. He participated in the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325 A.D.) and protected Orthodoxy against the Arian heresy. It happened once that the infidel Persians with their armies attacked Nisibis. St. James, in a procession with the Cross and banner [Litija] came before the ramparts of the town. Alone he climbed and walked along the rampart not fearing the arrows of the adversary which were aimed at him. Walking along as he did, he prayed to God to preserve the town and the faithful in this manner: "That He [God] would send a plague of flies and mosquitoes on the Persians and by that to cause them to flee from the walls of the town of Nisibis." However, James did not seek the death of his enemies, nor did he seek whatever kind of catastrophe and defeat rather, one small vexation which would cause them to flee from Nisibis. God heard the prayers of His chosen one and sent a plague of flies and mosquitoes upon the Persians, driving them away. Thereby, the town of Nisibis was spared. St. James lived long and honorably. He died peacefully in old age in the year 350 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE MAXIMUS KAPSOKALIVITOS

In the fourteenth century, Maximus led an ascetical life as a monk on Mt. Athos in his own unique way. That is to say, he pretended to be a little crazy and constantly changed his dwelling place. His place of abode consisted of a hut made from branches. He built these huts one after the other and then burned them, for this he was called **Kapsokalivitos**, i.e., "**hut-burner**". He was considered insane until the arrival of St. Gregory Sinaites to Mt. Athos, who discovered in Maximus a unique ascetic, a wonder-working intercessor and "an angel in the flesh." He died in the Lord in the year 1320 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MAXIMUS

Prayer in the heart beats as a heart,
Prayer in the heart, together with breathing,
Internal prayer, the light from within,
On Athos, was manifested by Maximus.
As a spirit without a body, Maximus was uplifted,
From prayer, completely radiated with light;
From prayer, was filled with joy
From prayer, was filled with satisfaction
Through prayer, saw the heavens opened.
Through prayer, the human being was glorified,
By prayer, felt the nearness of Christ,
The Holy All-Pure One openly appeared to him.
With heaven the soul of Maximus was sated.
Gregory of Sinai once asked him:
"Tell me, O righteous Maximus, from where do you know
That you have good and not evil visions,
And that all of these are not illusions of the devil,
False temptations and Satan's deceptions?"
"From this, I know," says he, "that they are not lies,
That these visions, the spirit and body console,
That my spirit always yearns after them
That, from the sign of the cross, they will not vanish,
By sweet joy, a temptation, I know it is not,
By blessed joy that warms me completely."

REFLECTION

A good deed done in silence is worth more than a good deed done with an explanation and is incomparably worth more than the most spiritual explanation without a good deed. From St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia, no words have remained, but his deeds have remained. On three occasions without any explanations, he came at night to the home of a poor man and secretly tossed a bag of gold through the window. A certain elder of a Scete in Egypt became very ill and desired to eat a little fresh bread, for the bread that the monks ate, at that time, was dried in the sun and lasted for months. Upon hearing this, one of the monks, not saying anything to anyone, departed the Scete and went to a distant town where he purchased fresh bread for the ailing elder. Learning about the effort of this monk, the elder did not want the bread saying: "That is the blood of my brother!" (That is to say, the brother, provided it with great difficulty, with great effort). Then, the other monks implored the elder to eat, saying to him, "Do not despise the sacrifice of the brother." What kind of explanation and what words of brotherly love are able to replace this simple and silent act of brotherly love?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the hunger and thirst of the Lord Jesus for justice:

1. How He comes into the world to restore down-trodden justice;
2. How He proclaims God's justice and unmasks injustice;
3. How He hurriedly does numerous acts of justice in order to leave us an example.

HOMILY

-About the Kingdom of God which is within-

"The Kingdom of God is within you" (St. Luke 17:21).

All that belongs to God carries the seal of immortality. And, the Kingdom of God is immortal. If we desire to breathe the air of immortality, we must enter within ourselves, within our hearts, within the Kingdom of God. Outside of ourselves is the air of time, the air of transitoriness and decay in which the soul breathes with difficulty. The kingdom of nature is the sensual kingdom; hence, a foreign kingdom in comparison to our soul which represents our inner kingdom. Why do men love to reside for a long, long time in a foreign land? Why do they rarely and reluctantly enter into their own home? Whenever we think about the world, we think about that which is foreign land. Whenever we converse about the sensual world, we converse about a foreign land. Living by the senses, we are similar to a man who rushes around all day to the homes of strangers, and only at night, returns to his own home to sleep. And so, we dedicate our vigilance to death and our sleep to immortality! We come to ourselves; we return to ourselves only in sleep. But, even our sleep is dreaming of our reality, i.e., even when we are in our own home, in an unconscious state, we dream of foreign homes: Our dreams are sensual, for our consciousness is sensual. And so, we are in a foreign land; we are strangers in reality and in dreams. We are constantly outside ourselves. The Lord wants to return us to ourselves, in His home and to His homeland. For us, the Kingdom of God is within us: outside of ourselves is a foreign land. In order to escape from a foreign land and find our true home, in which we directly encounter God, we must enter within ourselves, into our hearts. There is the King, there also is the Kingdom.

O Lord, King of the angels and saints, show us the riches and the light of Your Kingdom within us. That we may love Your kingdom more than we love the foreign land of the sensual, the kingdom of change and transitoriness.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 14 -

1. SAINT SAVA [SABAS], ARCHBISHOP OF THE SERBS

Sava was born in 1169 A.D. He was the son of Stephen [Stefan] Nemanja the Grand Zhupan of the Serbs. As a young man, Sava yearned for the spiritual life for which he fled to the Holy Mountain [Mt. Athos] where he was tonsured a monk and with rare zeal lived according to the ascetical rule. Stefan Nemanja followed the example of his son and came to the Holy Mountain where he was tonsured a monk and died as Simeon, the monk. Sava obtained the independence of the Serbian Church from the [Byzantine] emperor and patriarch and became the first Archbishop of the Serbs. Together with his father, he built the Monastery Hilendar and, after that, many other monasteries, churches and schools throughout the Serbian lands. On two occasions, he made a pilgrimage to the sacred places in the Holy Land. He restored peace between his two brothers who were estranged because of a struggle for power. He restored peace between the Serbs and their neighbors. In establishing the Serbian Church, he was, through that, establishing the Serbian State and culture. He instilled peace between all the Balkan peoples and worked for the benefit of all for which he was loved and respected by all the Balkan peoples. To the Serbian people he gave a Christian soul which did not perish with the collapse of the Serbian State. Sava died in Trnovo, Bulgaria, during the reign of Emperor Asen, having become ill following the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Epiphany on January 12, 1236 A.D. King Vladislav translated his body to the Milieshevo Monastery from which Sinan Pasha removed it and burned it on Vracar in Belgrade, April 27, 1595 A.D.

2. VENERABLE MARTYRS: THE FATHERS OF SINAI AND RAITHU

These holy martyrs, were slain by the Saracens, those fathers of Sinai in the fourth century and those fathers of Raithu in the fifth century.

3. SAINT HILARY, BISHOP OF POITERS

Hilary was an ardent combatant against the heresy of Arius in the west. He suffered much because of his defense of Orthodoxy. Hilary wrote many papers; the most important thesis was about the Holy Trinity. He died in the Lord in the year 362 A.D.

4. SAINT NINA, THE ENLIGHTENER OF THE GEORGIANS

Nina was a relative of St. George the Great Martyr and Juvenal, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Her parents belonged to the nobility in Cappadocia and since they both were tonsured in the monastic state, Nina was educated under the tutelage of Patriarch Juvenal. Hearing about the people of Georgia, the virgin Nina, from an early age, desired to go to Georgia and to baptize the Georgians. The All-Holy Mother of God appeared to Nina and promised to take her to this land. When our Lord opened the way, the young Nina, indeed, traveled to Georgia where, in a short period of time, she gained the love of the Georgian people. Nina succeeded in baptizing the Georgian Emperor Mirian, his wife Nana and their son Bakar, who, later on, zealously assisted in Nina's missionary work. During her lifetime, Nina traveled throughout Georgia, mainly to convert the entire nation to the Faith of Christ, exactly at the time of the terrible persecution of the Christians at the hands of Emperor Diocletian. Having rested from her many labors, Nina died in the Lord in the year 335 A.D. Her body is entombed in the Cathedral Church in Mtskheta. She worked many miracles during her life and after her death.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT NINA

Virgin most beautiful, Nina of noble birth,
By Divine Providence became the Apostle to the Georgians,
In defiance of the persecution by Diocletian, the Emperor,
With the Cross, she baptized Emperor Mirian
His wife Nana and his son Bakar,
Through them, all the people and the elite of the leaders,
With the Cross of the Son of God, baptized them all,
Saint Nina, Apostle to the Georgians.
From her youth, Nina prayed to God
That Djul (the Rose) - Georgia, she baptize.
For that which she prayed to God, the good God granted:
From Nina's hand, the Cross shown
To docile Georgia where it shines even now,
Where Nina's hand blesses even now.
There is Nina's grave, over which a church glistens,
Glorifying Saint Nina and the Lord Christ.

REFLECTION

If, at times, the dogmas of the Faith seem to be like solid food, first endeavor to fulfill the moral dogmas of Christianity, then the understanding of the dogmas of the Faith will be revealed to you. Inquisitive questioning of higher things without effort regarding the improvement of your life does not bring any benefit. At one time, the monks of Egypt reflected about Melchisedek and not being able to come to a clear understanding about the mysterious personality of this ancient king and high priest, invited Abba Copres to their assembly and asked him about Melchisedek. Upon hearing this, Copres struck himself three times on the mouth and said, "Woe to you Copres! You left that which God commanded you to do and you question that which God does not require of you." Hearing him, the monks were ashamed and dispersed. St. John Chrysostom writes, "And, if we adhere to the true dogmas and are not concerned about our behavior, we will not have any kind of benefit; and in the same way, if we concern ourselves about our behavior and neglect true dogmas, we will receive no benefit for our salvation. If we want to be delivered from Gehenna and to gain the kingdom, we need to be adorned on both sides: correctness of dogmas and honorable living."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the mercy of the Lord Jesus:

1. Toward sinners and toward those who are ill;
2. Toward the people who are confused as a flock without a shepherd;
3. Toward mankind in general for whom He allowed Himself to be crucified.

HOMILY

-About the visions of the invisible world-

"We look not to what is seen but to what is unseen"(2 Corinthians 4:18).

We see this material and transient world, but we look to that spiritual and immortal world.

We see earthly joy, often interrupted by tears and sighs and, in the end, always concluded in death; but we look to spiritual joy among the angels and saints of God in the heavens, to joy uninterrupted and eternal.

We see sufferings and failures of the righteous in this life; but we look at their glory and celebration in that world.

We see many successes, glory and honor of the unrighteous in this life, but we see their defeat, condemnation and indescribable torment in eternity.

We see the Church of God often humiliated and persecuted in this world, but we look to the final victory of the Church over all of her enemies and adversaries both visible and invisible.

Brethren, we often see tyrants and abductors as rulers and wealthy men in this age, and we see saints as poor, dejected and forgotten, but we look at the other kingdom, the Kingdom of God, eternal, sinless and immortal in which the saints will reign without one, no, not one tyrant or abductor.

O Lord, most patient and most merciful, open our spiritual vision that we may see that which awaits us after this short-lived life and that we endeavor to fulfill Your law.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE PAUL OF THEBES

Paul was born of wealthy parents in Lower Thebes in Egypt during the reign of Emperor Decius. Paul, along with his sister, inherited all the property of their parents. But his brother-in-law, an idolater, wanted to confiscate Paul's share of the property and threatened to betray Paul before the judge as a Christian if he did not cede his property to him. On one hand, that misfortune and on the other hand those heroic examples of self-sacrifices of Christian martyrs which Paul saw with his own eyes motivated him to give his share of the property to his sister and he, as a pauper, withdrew into the desert where he lived an ascetical life until his death. To what spiritual heights this ascetical giant reached is witnessed by no less a person than St. Anthony the Great who, at one time, visited Paul and saw how the wild beasts and birds of heaven ministered to him. Returning from this visit, Anthony said to his monks, "Woe is me, my children! A sinful and false monk that I am, a monk only in name. I saw Elijah, I saw John in the wilderness and, in truth, I saw Paul in Paradise!" St. Paul lived one-hundred thirteen years and peacefully died in the Lord in the year 342 A.D.

2. VENERABLE JOHN KUSHCHNIK [KALYVITES - THE HUT DWELLER]

John was born in Constantinople of wealthy and distinguished parents during the reign of Leo I. He was the only child of his parents. Drawn by the inclination for the spiritual life, the young John secretly fled with a monk to a monastery in Asia Minor. In this monastery he remained for six years in the greatest restraint, prayer and obedience toward the abbot. Then the devil assailed him with temptation that he should leave the monastery and return home to his parents and there to live with them as a nobleman. Indeed, he returned to the home of his parents dressed as a beggar. He saw his parents, but did not introduce himself. He took up lodging as a beggar in their courtyard, living, so to say, from the crumbs which the servants threw to him and enduring many ridicules from everyone. As such, John lived for three years constantly praying to God that He save the souls of his father and mother. When John fell ill and sensed death approaching, he made himself known to his parents who recognized him by a precious book of the Gospels which they had given him in his childhood and which he had kept for himself as his only possession. And so, this young man, even though he was very wealthy, defeated the devil and saved his soul and the souls of his parents. He died in the Lord about the year 450 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE GABRIEL OF LESNOV

Gabriel was a Slav and companion of Prochorus of Pchinja and St. John of Rila. He lived a life of asceticism in the tenth century at Kratov on Mt. Lesnov where he erected a church dedicated to the Holy Archangel Michael. He was a miracle-worker during his life and after his death. The present-day beautiful church located there was built by John Oliver, a duke of Tsar Dushan. St. Gabriel died in the Lord toward the end of the tenth century.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR PANSOPHIUS

Pansophius was the son of the Alexandrian Pro-consul Nilus. He abandoned worldly honor and riches and as a young man was tonsured a monk. For twenty-seven years, he lived a strict life of asceticism, uplifting his spirit to the higher world. During the reign of Decius, he was dragged before the court where he was flogged for the Name of Christ until he gave up his soul to his God in great torment.

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE JOHN KALYVITES [KUSHCHNIK]

John was a young lad,
A young and wealthy lad,
But nothing tempted him -
Neither youth nor gold.
His father was a nobleman royal,
And his mother, a lady fine,
But he left them both
For the sake of the love of the Son of God.
His wealth was Christ,
All riches, all beauty.
Christ the Lord he loved
More than his own life.
And, instead of his parents
Now crying out in Hades,
Behold, their son, through poverty
Himself and them, he saved.
Even today, many people
Who, themselves, choke with riches,
John can shame,
And their sinful souls save.

REFLECTION

Do not ever think that God does not hear you when you pray to Him. He hears our thoughts just as we hear the voices and the words of one another. And, if He does not act immediately according to your prayer, i.e., either because you are praying to Him in an unworthy manner or because you ask something of Him which would be detrimental to you, or, because He, in His wisdom and providence delays the fulfillment of your petition until the proper moment. Father John of Kronstadt writes: "As by means of the electric telegraph we speedily communicate with persons who are far away from us, so, likewise, by means of lively faith, as though through the telegraph wires, we speedily communicate with God, with the angels and saints. As we entirely trust to the speed of the electric current and to its reaching its destination, so likewise, we should completely trust to the speed of the prayer of faith and to it reaching its destination. Send your petition to God and the saints by means of the telegraph of faith and you will speedily obtain an answer." And again, in another place St. John writes: "God and the created spirits and the souls of the departed as well as those of the living are thinking beings and thought is rapid and in some sort omnipresent. Think of them with your whole heart and they will be present with you. God will always be with you and necessarily so by the gift and power of God, the others will also be with you."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the purity of the Lord Jesus:

1. The purity of His mind;
2. The purity of His heart;
3. The purity of His will;
4. The purity of His tongue;
5. The purity of His appearance and all of His senses.

HOMILY

-About the victorious faith-

"And the victory that conquers the world in our faith" (I John 5:4).

Christ the Lord conquered the world. That, brethren, is also our victory. **The apostles** conquered the world and that is our victory. **The saints, virgins and martyrs** conquered the world and that is our victory. Brethren, there is nothing more powerful in the world than the Christian Faith. **The swords** that struck this Faith became blunt and broken but the Faith remained. The kings who fought against this Faith were smothered under the anathema of crimes. **The kingdoms** that waged war against this Faith are destroyed. **The towns** that rejected this Faith lay demolished in their ruins. **The heretics** who corrupted this Faith perished in soul and body and under anathema departed from this world, and this Faith remained.

Brethren, when the world pursues us with its temptations: the temptation of external beauty, the temptation of riches, the temptation of pleasure, the temptation of transient glory; with what shall we resist and by what shall we be victorious if not by this Faith? In truth, by nothing except by this invincible Faith which knows about something better than all the wealth of this world.

When all the temptations of this world reveal the opposite side of their faces, when beauty turns into ugliness, health into sickness, riches into poverty, glory into dishonor, authority into humiliation and all blossoming physical life into filth and stench--by what shall we overcome this grief, this decay, this fifth and stench, and to preserve oneself from despair, if not by this Faith? In truth, by nothing except this invincible Faith which teaches us eternal and unchangeable values in the Kingdom of Christ.

When death shows its destructive power over our neighbors, over our relatives and our families, over our flowers, over our crops, over the works of our hands and, when it turns its irresistible teeth even on us, by what shall we conquer the fear of death and by what shall we unlock the doors of life, stronger than death, if not by this Faith? In truth, by nothing except this invincible Faith, which knows about the resurrection and life without death.

O Lord Jesus, the Conqueror of the world, help us also to conquer the world with faith in You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 16 -

1. SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE (THE CHAINS OF ST. PETER)

Saint Peter is commemorated on this day because of the chains by which he was shackled by the lawless Herod and which during the appearance of an angel in prison fell from him, "**Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, 'Get up quickly.' The chains fell from his wrists**" (**Acts of the Apostles 12:7**). The chains were preserved by Christians as much for the memory of this great apostle as well as for their healing power, for many of the sick were healed by touching them as well as with the towel of the Apostle Paul, "**then when the face cloths or aprons that touched his skin were applied to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them**" (**Acts of the Apostles 19:12**). St. Juvenal, the Patriarch of Jerusalem gave these chains as a gift to the Empress Eudocia, the exiled wife of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger. She divided them into two and sent one half to the Church of the Holy Apostle in Constantinople and the other half to her daughter Empress Eudoxia in Rome, the wife of Valentinian. Eudoxia built the Church of St. Peter and deposited these chains in it, together with those chains with which Peter was shackled before his death under Emperor Nero.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS SPEUSIPPUS, ELEUSIPPUS, MELEUSIPPUS AND THEIR GRANDMOTHER LEONILLA.

The three brothers, triplets, Speusippus, Eleusippus, Meleusippus all suffered for Christ in France during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161 A.D. -180A.D.). At first, only Leonilla was a Christian while her grandsons were heathens. After prolonged counseling on the part of their pious grandmother and of the local priest, these three brothers received baptism. Having been baptized and with youthful zeal, they began to live a devoted life for their Faith and with this passion destroyed all the idols in the whole vicinity. Accused and brought before the tribunal, they acknowledged their act and openly confessed their faith in Christ. The judge had them thrown into prison and summoned Leonilla, the grandmother, and directed that she, too, go to the prison and counsel her grandsons to deny Christ and to worship the idols. Without a word, Leonilla went to the prison, but instead of counseling her grandsons to deny the True Faith, she began to encourage them not to waver but to endure all torments to the end and to die for Christ. When the judge, again, questioned them and realized their even stronger steadfastness in the Faith, he condemned them to death. At first, all three of them were hanged on a tree where they hung "as strings on a gulsu"* after which, they were flogged and finally burned in fire. A certain woman, Jovilla, enthusiastic at the courage of these martyrs cried out: "I am a Christian also!" They immediately apprehended her who, together with the elderly Leonilla, was beheaded.]

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR DAMASKIN OF GABROVO

Damaskin led a life of asceticism in Hilendar [Mt. Athos] where he became the abbot. When he sought from some Turks payment of a debt due to the monastery, they persuaded a Muslim woman to enter the house where Damaskin lived. Then, those same Turks came and, finding this woman, dragged Damaskin before the Cadi [Muslim Judge] who then proposed to him: either be hanged or convert to Islam. To this Damaskin decisively responded, "It would be insanity if I for this transient life would purchase eternal death." He was hanged in the year 1771 A.D. in Svishtov. Thus, Damaskin sacrificed his body in order to save his soul. God's punishment immediately befell his murderers. While crossing the Danube river, in a row boat, a storm arose and capsized the boat and drowned them.

4. THE VENERABLE ROMIL

Romil was born in Vidin. He was a disciple of St. Gregory Sinaite. He lived a life of asceticism in several monasteries. Together with him in the Monastery Ravanica [Serbia] lived Constantine Camblak. St. Romil died in the Lord about the year 1375 A.D. in the Monastery Ravanica.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT LEONILLA

Leonilla, grandmother aged,
By the spirit, powerful as a lioness,
When her grandsons for God, she prepared,
Herself, a martyr became.
To Leonilla, the tribune screamed,
And from bitter anger, hissing:
Proceed, grandmother, to the dungeon,
And your grandsons, to counsel.
Counsel your grandsons to deny
The so-called Christ the Lord,
Either Christ to renounce
Or their young lives.
Leonilla, in the dungeon
To her grandsons, speaks:
Of worldly powers, do not be afraid,
Even though they burn you alive.
Adhere to the glorious Christ
And His Good News,
For you, He prepared
Eternity of radiance and joy.
Of bitter wounds, do not be afraid,
Neither of death, for they are transitory:
The faithful to Christ, death cannot
Either conceal or crush.
Three grandsons, in the midst of fire
To God offered praise,
While the evil one their dear grandmother
Leonilla beheaded.

REFLECTION

Nothing crushes human pride as does habitual obedience toward elders. In ancient Sparta, obedience was considered a great virtue. It is said a Spartan soldier, who rushed into battle armed with a sword, caught up with his enemy and at the precise moment when he was about to slay him, the trumpet sounded to end the fighting and the Spartan replaced his sword in the sheath. When someone who saw this asked him: "Why did you not slay the enemy?" He replied: " It is better to obey the commander than to slay the enemy." Christian obedience differs from this Spartan obedience in that it is voluntary and has as its goal the salvation of the soul; i.e., it is not for the preservation of the earthly kingdom but rather for obtaining of the heavenly kingdom. St. John the Short [Colobus] began his ascetical life with a certain elder of Thebes. In order to teach his disciple obedience, the elder planted a withered tree in the ground and ordered his disciple to water it daily. For three years, John without murmuring watered this withered tree until it finally turned green and brought forth fruit. This is the fruit of resigned obedience. The Crucified Lord Himself **"became obedient to death" (Philippians 2:8).**

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the peace of the Lord Jesus:

1. The peace which He carried in His soul: **The only, perfect Peace-bearer;**
2. The peace which He created among men: **The only, perfect Peace-maker;**
3. The peace which He gave to His disciples: **The only, perfect Peace-giver.**

HOMILY

-About how we all are free only if we are slaves of Christ-

"For the slave called in the Lord is a freed person in the Lord, just as the free person who has been called is a slave of Christ" (I Corinthians 7:22).

The great news that Christianity daily announces to the world is that nothing is evaluated at full value according to its external appearance but by its essence. Do not evaluate things according to its color and shape but by its meaning. Do not evaluate a man by his position and property but by his heart - by his heart in which are united his feeling, his reason and his will.

According to this, for the world always a new teaching; he is not a slave who is outwardly enslaved; neither is he free who possesses outward physical freedom. According to secular understanding, the slave is one who enjoys the world the least and a free man is one who enjoys the world the most. According to Christian understanding, a slave is one who least enjoys from the living and sweet Christ and the free man is one who enjoys most from the living and sweet Christ. Further, according to secular understanding, the slave is one who carries out his own will less frequently and who carries out the will of others more frequently, and a free man is one who carries out his will more often and even less often the will of others. However, according to Christian understanding, the slave is one who carries out his will more often and even less often the will of God, and the free man is one who carries out the will of God more frequently and who carries out even less frequently, his own will. To be a slave to the Lord is the only true and worthy freedom of man and, to be a slave to the world and to one's self, sin and vice is the only fatal slavery. Of the kings on the throne, a man would think: Are there any more free men on earth than those? However, many kings were the most base and the most unworthy slaves of the earth. Of shackled Christians in the dungeons, a man would think: Are there any more miserable slaves on earth than they? However, the Christian martyrs in the prisons felt as free men and were filled with spiritual joy; they chanted Psalms and raised up prayers of gratitude to God. Freedom which is tied to grief and sorrow is not freedom but slavery. Only freedom in Christ is tied with unspeakable joy. Lasting joy is the mark of true freedom.

O Lord Jesus, the only Good Lord, Who grants us freedom when You tie us stronger to Yourself, make us Your slaves as soon as possible that we would cease to be slaves of cruel and unmerciful masters.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 17 -

1. VENERABLE ANTHONY THE GREAT

Anthony was an Egyptian and was born about the year 250 A.D. in the village of Koman near Herculea. Following the demise of his noble and wealthy parents, he divided the inherited estate with his sister, who was a minor, and provided for her with some relatives. Anthony distributed his half of the estate to the poor and, he, in his twentieth year, dedicated himself to the ascetical life for which he yearned from his childhood. In the beginning Anthony lived a life of asceticism in the proximity of his village but, in order to flee the disturbances of people, he withdrew into the wilderness on the shore of the Red Sea, where he spent twenty years as a recluse not associating with anyone except with God through constant prayer, reflection and contemplation, patiently enduring unspeakable temptations from the devil. His fame spread throughout the entire world and many disciples gathered around him whom he placed on the path of salvation by his example and words. During the eighty-five years of his ascetical life, only twice did he go to Alexandria. The first time to seek martyrdom during the time of the persecution of the Church and, the second time at the invitation of St. Athanasius, in order to refute the accusation of the Arians: supposedly that he, too, was an adherent of the Arian heresy. Anthony died in the one-hundred fifth year of his life, leaving behind an entire army of his disciples and imitators. Even though Anthony was not a scholar, nevertheless, he was a counselor and teacher of the most learned men of that time, as was St. Athanasius the Great. When certain Greek philosophers tempted him with literary wisdom, Anthony shamed them with the question: "Which is older, the understanding or the book? Which of these two was the cause of the other?" Ashamed, the philosophers dispersed for they perceived that they only had literary knowledge without understanding and Anthony had understanding. Here is a man who attained perfection in as far as man, in general, can attain on earth. Here is an instructor to instructors and a teacher to teachers, who, for a full eighty five years perfected himself and only in that way was he able to perfect many others. Filled with many years of life and great works, Anthony died in the Lord in the year 335 A.D.

2. THE HOLY EMPEROR THEODOSIUS THE GREAT

This glorious and zealous emperor in the Faith reigned from 379 A.D. to 395 A.D. Constantine the Great banned the persecution of Christians. Theodosius the Great went one step further, he outlawed the offering of idolatrous sacrifices in his realm. He assisted with strengthening and spreading the Christian Faith throughout the world.

3. THE HOLY NEO-MARTYR GEORGE OF IOANNINA

George was an Albanian. He was born in the village of Churkli, Albania of very impoverished farmer parents. The Turks used force to persuade George to embrace Islam, but he remained steadfast in the Christian Faith for which he was hanged in Ioannina on January 17, 1838 A.D. Even unto today, George is a great miracle-worker and healer.

HYMN OF PRAISE

ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT - ST. THEODOSIUS THE GREAT

ST. GEORGE THE NEW MARTYR

Above all divisions, above all classes,
The fearless God stands; the Lord above armies.
The wealthy he does not despise, nor, of the poor, is He ashamed.
Of the powerful, He is not afraid and, to the sinful, He beckons: Come!
Saints from everywhere, for Himself, He recruits
This one who begs and that one who rules
As a cherry-picker that plucks only the sweet cherries
Without concern, whether the branches are coarse or smooth,
Into one beautiful wreath, the Lord weaves all,
Only when the souls are repentant and holy.
Anthony the wonderful, throughout his life fasted,
Theodosius, the whole world, treated with Christ.
And George of Ioannina, his blood for Christ, shed -
All three, the Lord loved, eternally. The Lord does not have loathing toward His crops
Nor toward other weaknesses of the created world.
Toward all, He is the same, but toward Him, all are not,
To everyone, He is of service; to everything merciful,
Always, above everything and above all classes,
Always, the fearless God; the Lord above armies.

REFLECTION

St. Anthony teaches: "Learn to love humility, for it will cover all your sins. All sins are repugnant before God but the most repugnant of all is pride of the heart. Do not consider yourself learned and wise; otherwise, all your effort will be destroyed and your boat will reach the harbor empty. If you have great authority, do not threaten anyone with death. Know, that according to nature, you too are susceptible to death and that every soul sheds its body from itself as the final garment." In Byzantium there existed an unusual and instructive custom during the crowning of the emperors in the Church of the Divine Wisdom [St. Sophia]. The custom was that when the patriarch placed the crown on the emperor's head, at the same time, he handed him a silk purse filled with dirt from the grave. Then, even the emperor would recall death and to avoid all pride and become humble.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the persecution of the Lord Jesus for righteousness sake:

1. His persecution as a child by Herod;
2. His persecution as a man and Messiah by the Jewish scribes and elders;
3. His persecution as God by many of our contemporary scribes and elders both Jewish and Christian.

HOMILY

-About two different types of wisdom-

"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God" (I Corinthians 3:19).

Even this scriptural concept is one great news which Christianity proclaims to the world. One is the wisdom according to God and from God and the other is the wisdom according to the world and from the world. Wisdom, according to God, is from the Holy Spirit. The apostles were filled with such wisdom when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. Wisdom, according to the world, is from the senses and from material and it represents true insanity before God if it is not seasoned and inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

All worldly wisdom which is guided only by the physical senses, without regard for the Holy Spirit, is insanity before God and before God's angels; for such a wisdom does not perceive either the spirit or the purpose of this world; rather it knows this world only as ashes from without and ashes from within; as ashes which the wind of chance piles up and strews at one moment this way and at another moment that way.

All wisdom of man which is directed only by the senses and by physical conceptions and fantasies is insanity before God and before angels and saints of God, for it does not know man as man; that is, as a spiritual being related to God, rather it knows man only as a body from without and as a body from within; as a body according to form and as a body according to essence. It is the same as if a monkey, looking at an iron locomotive, described it and said, "This is iron on the outside and iron on the inside; iron which heats it and iron which operates it, iron which gives it direction and iron which stops it!"

Brethren, who is able to be filled with the wisdom of God except him who, at first, empties himself of the insanity's of the world? With God's help, each one of us can do this. However, to our desires and to our efforts, without Faith, God's help goes to assist us. For God alone is Goodness, Wisdom and Holiness.

O Good Lord, Wise and Holy, fill us with Your Life-creating wisdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT ATHANASIUS THE GREAT, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

Athanasius was born in Alexandria in the year 296 A.D. and from his early childhood had an inclination to the spiritual life. He was a deacon to Archbishop Alexander and accompanied him to the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325 A.D.]. It was at this Council that Athanasius became renowned for his learning, devotion to and zeal for Orthodoxy. He contributed greatly to destroy the heresy of Arius and to strengthen Orthodoxy. He wrote the Symbol of Faith [The Creed] which was adopted at the Council. Following the death of Alexander, Athanasius was elected Archbishop of Alexandria. In his calling as Archbishop of Alexandria, he remained for forty years, although not for the entire time on the archepiscopal throne of the archbishopric. With few exceptions, throughout his life he was persecuted by heretics. Of the emperors, he was persecuted mostly by Constantius, Julian and Valens; of the bishops, by Eusebius of Nicomedia and many others; and by the heretic Arius and his followers. Athanasius was forced to hide from his persecutors, even in a well, in a grave, in private homes and in the deserts. Twice he was forced to flee to Rome. Only before his death, did he live peacefully for a while as the good shepherd among his good flock who truly loved him. Few are the saints who were so mercilessly slandered and so criminally persecuted as St. Athanasius. His great soul patiently endured all for the love of Christ and, in the end, emerged victorious from this entire, terrible and long-lasting struggle. For counsel, for comfort and for moral support, Athanasius often visited St. Anthony, whom he respected as his spiritual father. For a man who formulated the greatest truth, Athanasius had much to suffer for that truth until in the year 373 A.D., the Lord gave him repose in His kingdom as His faithful servant.

2. SAINT MAXIM, ARCHBISHOP OF WALLACHIA

Maxim was the son of the Serbian Despot [Prince] Stephen and Despotica [Princess] Angelina. He was tonsured a monk in the Monastery Manasija. Pressured by the Turks, he fled to Romania, where he was consecrated to the vacated throne of the Archbishop of Wallachia. He brokered a truce between the warring commanders Radul and Bogdan and averted a war between them. In his later years, he returned to Krusedol where he built a monastery and, after a lengthy ascetical life, died there on January 18, 1546 A.D. His incorrupt and miracle-working relics repose, even now, in this monastery.

HYMN OF PRAISE

CHRIST IS WISDOM

Through Athanasius, wisdom shown,
And the truth of God enlightened men.
Wisdom is not bitter, the people recognized;
But, to everyone who drinks of it to the bottom, it is sweet,
To everyone who suffered for it, it is dear.
To whomever, in the world, all hope is first extinguished,
Who walks throughout the world as over an old cemetery,
Who thinks about men as about weak slavery,
Who thinks about five earthly dry lands [continents] as about five threshing floors,
Who thinks about five puddles, as about five oceans -
To him, Christ is the measure by which eternity is measured'
Adhere to that measure, confirmed in faith;
Whoever recognizes this measure [Christ] will never abandon it,
For the mysteries of the world, he will find no other;
Every other measure, in spite of exertion
Does not reach to the Alpha nor the Omega,
But is as deceiving as the moon which crawls over the water.
But appears that it reaches to the bottom of the water.
Christ surpasses both ends of the world,
Where the drama ends and where it began.
Of all the mysteries, the greatest mystery is He.
From His Nativity to His Crucifixion on the Cross,
From His Crucifixion on the Cross to His Resurrection -
He is the true measure of all God's creation.
By Him, measuring sufferings in the midst of worldly rumbling
The saints of God suffered -- without pain.

REFLECTION

To the question: "Why did the Son of God appear on earth in a human body and not in another form of creation?", the brilliant St. Athanasius replied in this manner: "If they ask why did He not appear in some other better form of creation, for example: as the sun or the moon, or the stars or fire, or the wind but just as a man? Let them know that the Lord did not come to show Himself but to heal and teach sufferers. For, to reveal Himself only to amaze the viewers would mean to come for a show. It was necessary for the Healer and the Teacher, not only to come, but to serve for the benefit of the suffering ones and to reveal Himself as such so that this revelation would be bearable for the sufferers. Not one single creature was in error in the eyes of God, except man alone: neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the sky, nor the stars, nor water, nor wind did betray their ranks but, on the contrary, knowing their Creator and their King - The Word [The Logos], they all remained as they were created; only human beings separated themselves from good and replaced truth with deceit, and the honor belonging to God, as well as the knowledge about Him, they transferred to devils and to men carved out of stone [idols]. What is, therefore, so unbelievable in this, that the Logos [The Word - The Son Of God] appeared as a man to save mankind?" Indeed, even as we ask the unbelievers of our day: In what form would you wish God to appear, if not as a man?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus burdened by slander and shame for the sake of our salvation:

1. Burdened by slander and shame from Jewish scribes and elders;
2. Burdened by slander and shame from the many contemporary scribes and elders;
3. Burdened by slander and shame from everyone of us who have been baptized in His Name and who have not fulfilled His law.

HOMILY

-About danger-

"Gird your loins and light your lamps" (St. Luke 12:33).

This is the commandment of Him Who knows the weaknesses of our being and Who desires our good more than our father and mother do. This is the commandment of our mankind-loving Lord. When man is ungirded, does not his entire body droop a little? When he girds and harnesses himself, does not the entire body become as erect as a candle? As a candle stands, so must our soul stand erect before God. How will our souls stand erect before God if unrestrained physical earthly passions and lusts weigh them down? Behold, between the loins is the nest of the main physical passions. To gird one's loins means to tighten oneself with restraint and not to give into passions at will. But to gird one's physical loins is not the goal but the means which we utilize to easily gird our mind, our heart and our will. Physical restraint is the primary school of our Christian character; after it, comes a higher school in which we learn restraint of the mind, restraint of the heart and restraint of the will. **If we gird our mind**, then in its narrowness, lustful thoughts would be unable to find a place in it. **If we gird our heart**, then lustful desires would be unable to find a place in it. **If we gird our will**, then the evil, beastly and demonic desires would be unable to find a place in it.

Brethren, by a narrow path can one enter into the Kingdom of God. In the narrowness of the mind, the heart and the will can the candles of all virtues be lighted whose flame rises toward God. Under the lighted candles, we should understand Christian virtues.

O Lord, pure and sinless, the hearth of all virtues, help us to gird ourselves with restraint and to walk the narrow path to You with lighted candles, which You brought into the world.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE MACARIUS THE GREAT

Macarius was an Egyptian and one of the younger contemporaries of Anthony the Great. His father was a priest. Out of obedience to his parents, Macarius married. However, his wife died shortly thereafter and he withdrew into the wilderness where he spent sixty years in labor and struggle, both internally and externally for the Kingdom of Heaven. When they asked him: "Why is he so thin when he eats and when he does not eat?" He responded: "From the fear of God." So much did he succeed in cleansing his mind of evil thoughts and his heart of evil desires that God bestowed upon him the abundant gift of miracle-working so that he even raised the dead from the graves. His humility amazed both men and demons. A demon once said to him: "There is only one thing in which I am unable to overpower you. It is not in fasting; for I do not eat anything. It is not in vigils; for I never sleep." "But, what is it?" asked Macarius. "Your humility" answered the demon. Macarius often spoke to Paphnutius, his disciple: "Do not judge anyone and you will be saved." Macarius lived to be ninety-seven years old. Nine days before his death, St. Anthony and St. Pachomius appeared to him from the other world and informed him that he would die within nine days, which happened. Also, before his death, Macarius had a vision in which a cherubim revealed to him the blessed heavenly world, commended his effort and his virtue and said to him that he was sent to take his soul into the Kingdom of Heaven. He died in the year 390 A.D.

2. VENERABLE MARCARIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

Macarius was born in Alexandria and, at first, was a fruit vendor. He was baptized at age forty and as soon as he was baptized, he immediately withdrew to lead a life of asceticism. At first, he, together with Macarius the Great, was a disciple of St. Anthony. After that, he became the abbot of the Monastery called the Cells, located between Nitria and Skete. He was somewhat younger than Macarius the Great and also lived longer. He lived to be more than a hundred years old. Tormented by demonic temptations, especially the temptation of vanity, he humbled himself by the most rigorous labors and ceaseless prayer, uplifting his mind constantly toward God. Once, a brother saw him fill a basket with sand, carry it uphill and empty it. Astonished, the brother asked him, "What are you doing?" Macarius answered, "I am tormenting my tormentor," i.e. the devil. He died in the year 393 A.D.

3. SAINT ARSENIUS, BISHOP OF CORFU

Arsenius augmented and structured the Rite of the Sacrament of Holy Unction [Anointing with Oil] to its present form. He died in the year 959 A.D. His relics repose in the cathedral church in Corfu.

4. SAINT MARK, ARCHBISHOP OF EPHESUS

Mark was famous for his courageous defense of Orthodoxy at the Council of Florence (1439 A.D.) in spite of the emperor and the pope. He died peacefully in the year 1452 A.D. On his death bed, Mark implored Gregory, his disciple, and later the glorious Patriarch Genadius, to be careful of the snares of the West and to defend Orthodoxy.

5. BLESSED THEODORE, "FOOL FOR CHRIST" FROM NOVGOROD

Prior to his death, Theodore ran up and down the streets shouting to everyone: "Farewell, I am traveling far away!" He died in the year 1392 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MACARIUS THE GREAT

In Egypt, in the desert
Great loved reigned
Among the simple monks,
As in the kingdom of the saints.
Saint Macarius was
as a cherubim among them.
In every good deed
An example to the monks was he.
Macarius became ill;
For him, a monk went out to seek strawberries,
He went forth, he found, and he brought them
To soothe his elder's pain.
To partake of them, Macarius did not want,
He said, "There is a brother more ill.
Bring it to him; this gift is
more needed to that brother."
The second ailing brother cried and,
To the gift-bearer, said: "Forgive me!
But my neighbor is more needy
Of this charity than I."
The gift-bearer, the gift he took away
And, to that neighbor, gave it,
This one gave it to a third,
And that one to a fourth; all in order,
From cell to cell,
And from brother to brother,
Until the last one with the strawberries
To Macarius, at the door!
"Behold, father, you are ill!"
Macarius began to weep,
Seeing this wonderful brotherly love -
Neither did he want to eat.
He spilled them over the hot sand,
And, to God he gave thanks,
That the dead, arid desert,
Because of love, became Paradise.
The more a brother loves his brother
Than he loves himself:
"O Lord, the gift is this,
The gift of love, the gift from You!"

REFLECTION

Examples of the meek in enduring assaults such as we find in the Holy Fathers are simply amazing. Returning once from the path to his cell, Macarius the Great saw a certain thief removing his belongings from his cell and loading them onto a donkey. Macarius did not say anything to him but rather began to assist him to comfortably load all the things on the donkey, saying to himself, **"For we brought nothing into the world" (I Timothy 6:7)**. Another elder, when the thieves stole everything from his cell, looked around, noticed that they did not take a bundle with money which lay hidden somewhere, and immediately took this bundle, called out to the thieves and gave that to them also. Again, a third elder came across thieves as they were robbing his cell and cried out to them: "Hurry, hurry before the brothers come that they may not prevent me to fulfill the commandments of Christ." **"From the one who takes what is yours, do not demand it back" (St. Luke 6:30)**.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Salt of the earth:

1. As the Salt which gives flavor to this life in general;
2. As the Salt which preserves mankind from decay, who would, otherwise, be totally decayed from one end of its history to the other;
3. As the Salt of my own life.

HOMILY

-About victory over the world-

"In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (St. John 16:33).

The Only One and the Unique One, the Conqueror of the World, with these words, teaches His followers not to be afraid of the world.

Indeed, the world appears very strong; however, is not the One Who created the world, stronger than the world?

The world is very frightening for him who does not know that God rules the world and that He has the authority to hold it in existence as long as He wills and to return it into non-existence whenever He wills. But, to him who knows that, the world is not frightening.

Compared to Christ the Lord, this world is as a fabric woven of weakness itself; while in Christ the Lord, there is not a single weakness. To him who does not know that, the world is frightening and he who knows that, has no fear of the world.

The world has loaned us a body and because of that it wants to acquire our soul. How can the world overpower us if we stand as soldiers of the Conqueror of the world?

The Conqueror of the World gives us weapons for the battle. By His example, He teaches us how to fight it, reveals the hidden enemy, shows us the path of attack and retreat, holds us with His hand, protects us under His wing, feeds us by His Life-giving Body and more, He encourages us by shouting: **"Take courage!"** Brethren, what then can the world do when its defeat is sealed with the victory of Christ?

O Lord, the Conqueror of the World and our victorious commander, be close to us always that we may not become frightened and direct us, that we may always be close to You in heart, mind and soul.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT EUTHYMIUS THE GREAT

Of noble and distinguished parents, Euthymius was born in the Armenian town of Melitene near the Euphrates river about the year 377 A.D. He was the only child, a son, born in answer to the prayer of his mother Dionisiya, who had a heavenly vision regarding the birth of Euthymius. From his youth, he lived a life of asceticism, at first in the proximity of his town [Melitene] but then, after he visited Jerusalem at age twenty-nine, in the desert between Jerusalem and Jericho called Pharan. He filled his days and nights with prayer, internal thoughts about God, contemplation and physical exertion. Around him many disciples gathered some of whom are glorious saints, such as Cyriac the Hermit, St. Sabas the Sanctified, Theotictus and others. By God's gift, Euthymius was a great miracle worker; he expelled demons, healed the gravely ill, brought water to the desert, multiplied bread and prophesied. He taught monks the love of labor saying, "If you eat bread, not of your own labor, know that you are eating of someone else's labor." When some of the younger monks wanted to fast more than others, he forbade them to do so and commanded them to come to the communal table so that they would not become prideful as a result of their excessive fasting. He also said that it was not good for a monk to move from place to place, for he said, "A tree frequently transplanted does not bear fruit. Whoever desires to do good, can do it from the place where he is."

About love, he said, "What salt is to bread, love is to other virtues." During the first week of the Honorable Fast [Lenten Season], he retreated to the desert and remained there in solitary silence and godly-thoughts until just before the Feast of the Resurrection. During his life time, a large monastery [Lavra] was established in the proximity of his cave which later, throughout the centuries, was completely filled with monks as a beehive is filled with bees. His final command was that the monastery always adhere to hospitality and that the gates of the monastery never be closed. He died at the age of ninety-seven. The Patriarch of Jerusalem was in attendance at his funeral. The patriarch waited all day long until the great masses of people revered the body of the saint and only in the evening were they able to complete the Office for Burial for the Dead. On the seventh day following his death, Euthymius appeared radiant and rejoicing to Domentian, his disciple. The Venerable Euthymius, in truth, was a true "son of Light". He died in the year 473 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS INNAS, NIRRAS AND PINNAS

They are considered to be the first Slavic martyrs who are mentioned in history. They are referred to as Scythians and disciples of St. Andrew the Apostle. They suffered for the Faith at the hands of their pagan neighbors on the right side of the Danube river near Varna. Tied up on the ice, Innas, Nirras and Pinnas froze and died in the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EUTHYMIUS

The eye which sees all, the ear which hears all,
With all, travels and everywhere they travel;
Without changing place, they are in every place.
Where virtue is being kneaded, God is the yeast in the dough,
Where light is sought, He gives of Himself;
Where help is cried for, He does not absent Himself;
Quietly and silently, but always on time,
He has the time to reap and to sow the seeds,
He has the time to reproach, He has the time to reward,
To make the young old and to make the old young,
To weed, to trim and to caress fruits -
He reaches wherever He wants and He reaches when He wants.
Whenever a person alone thinks, behold, He listens,
Where two people speak, as a third party, He hears,
Where the weaver weaves the cloth, her threads He counts,
The universal fabric, in His mind He weaves,
O, who will His footsteps and paces know?
Who could enumerate His paths and places?
Eternal and Immortal, Triune and One,
In the roadless net of the universal fabric
Unseen and seen, regardless from where He is viewed
He cuts out the paths and reveals the direction.
In the roadless net, He looks at all the paths,
And does not allow not even an ant to stay.
Thoughts about Him, Saint Euthymius
For eighty years on earth, dedicated to Him.

REFLECTION

As much as the saints were so compassionate and lenient toward human weakness, so were they terribly unyielding and unbending in regard to the confession of the true dogmas of the Faith. Thus, St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia struck Arius with his fist at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325 A.D.]. St. Anthony left his desert to come to Alexandria to publicly unmask Arius. St. Euthymius, being greatly pressured by the Empress Eudocia and the pseudo-Patriarch Theodosius and being unable to debate rationally with them, left the monastery and hid in the desert. All other distinguished monks followed his example. Euthymius remained in the desert until the pseudo-patriarch was ousted and Orthodoxy strengthened. When, in Jerusalem, the greatest agitation surfaced in the name of the emperor against the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon, 451 A.D.] and when the entire population was frightened by the heretics, then St. Theodosius the Great already burdened with old age, as a fearless soldier of Christ, came to Jerusalem, entered the Great Church, ascended the stairs, waved his hands and said to the people, "If anyone does not respect the Fourth Ecumenical Council as he does the four evangelists, let him be anathema." (Until this time, only four Ecumenical Councils had been convened). All of those listeners were frightened by those words and none of the heretics dared to say anything contrary to those words.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as Light:

1. As a Light to my life; as a Light to mankind; as a Light to every creature;
2. As a Light, especially in the darkness of fear and suffering;
3. As a Light in the hour of death and after death; a Light in eternity.

HOMILY

-About the only Light in darkness-

"I am the Light of the world" (St. John 8:12).

Since the beginning of the world and time, no one who was ever born dared to speak these words. There were men and there are men who say: "I bring light!" But only one dared to say: **"I am the Light!"** Only the Lord Jesus could have spoken those words boldly and convincingly. His short life on earth and His long history, nearly two-thousand years, completely justified these words. **He is the Light of Truth. He is the Light of Righteousness and He is the Light of Life.**

He is the Light of Truth because He revealed in Himself the truth of the true nature of God and the true nature of man; and the relationship of man to man and the relationship of man toward God. Heaven and earth shall pass away and His words will not pass away for heaven and earth both came into existence by His word and His word is from Him and with Him always and will not pass away. **["Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" St. Matthew 24:35 - St. Mark 13:31].**

He is the Light of Righteousness because He revealed the might of righteousness and the weakness of unrighteousness. He revealed that in the brightest light, by that which He spoke, by that which He did, and by that which He experienced and overcame the unrighteous ones. He revealed that through His Church in the course of twenty centuries through His numerous righteous saints and martyrs for righteousness sake. Righteousness is from God, and in the long life of history it can never be defeated. Unrighteousness is from helpless beings. Unrighteousness quickly rushes out to the rampart with its triumphant banner but, at the same time, it is quickly overthrown into the grave.

He is the Light of Life. His words illuminate life. His works illuminate life. His victory illuminates life, especially His resurrection, as the most luminous sun by its bright light illuminates life and disperses death as a weak shadow.

O Lord Jesus, Light Most-Luminous, Sun of Truth, Sun of Righteousness and Sun of Life, illuminate us sinners and unworthy ones!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 21 -

1. VENERABLE MAXIMUS, THE CONFESSOR

Maximus was a Constantinopolitan by birth and, at first, a high-ranking courtier at the court of Emperor Heraclius and, after that, a monk and abbot of a monastery not too far from the capitol. He was the greatest defender of Orthodoxy against the so-called Monothelite heresy which proceeded from the heresy of Eutyches. That is to say: As Eutyches claimed that there is only one nature in Christ [Monophysitism], so the Monothelites claimed that there is only one will in Christ [Monothelitism]. Maximus opposed that claim and found himself as an opponent of the emperor and the patriarch. Maximus did not frighten easily but endured to the end in proving that there were two wills as well as two natures in Christ. Because of his efforts, a council was held in Carthage and another in Rome. Both councils anathematized the teachings of the Monothelites. The suffering of Maximus for Orthodoxy cannot be described: he was tortured by princes, deceived by prelates, spat upon by the masses of the people, beaten by soldiers, exiled, imprisoned, until finally, with a severed tongue and hand, he was condemned to exile for life in the land of Skhemaris [near Batum on the Black Sea] where he spent three years in prison and gave up his soul to God in the year 666 A.D.

2. BLESSED MAXIMUS, THE GREEK

Maximus was born in Greece and from there was invited to the court of Russian Tsar Basil [Vasilii] Ivanovitch to act as the Tsar's librarian and translator. He labored much, but he also suffered much for the truth. He spent a long time in prison where he wrote the well-known **Canon to the Holy Spirit** which is still used today in the Church. He died in the Lord in the year 1556 A.D.

3. THE HOLY PRIEST-MARTYR NEOPHYTUS

Neophytus was born in Nicaea. While he was still a child and with God's Grace, he worked great miracles. Neophytus brought forth water from a rock and raised his dead mother. He was led by a white dove to Mount Olympus where he drove a lion from its cave and there, took up residence. At age fifteen, he was tortured for Christ in Nicaea during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. By no means would he deny Christ. After beatings and imprisonment, Neophytus was thrown into the fire, but God preserved his life. Then, they placed him before a hungry lion, but the lion ingratiated himself to Neophytus. The saint recognizing this lion as the same one in whose cave he practiced asceticism, began to pet him and ordered the lion to return to the cave. Then Neophytus was pierced with a lance and his soul took up habitation in the mansion of the Lord.

4. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR AGNES

As a thirteen year old girl, Agnes was thrown into the fire for the Faith of Christ and was then beheaded. She showed great miracle-working power during life and after death. Agnes suffered during the reign of Diocletian in the year 305 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

The spaciousness of the sea broke out on all sides;
The earth as a trunk of the celestial garden,
But as a dark trunk with golden fruit--
Thus the dark earth with a starry firmament.
The earth silently extends its invisible branches,
And on the branches, stars, golden apples,
O, what wonderful fruit from an inexpensive mud,
What the mercy of God gave to the dark earth!
And man is earth; the body of the earth,
In the firmament are his stars; those are his good deeds,
His thoughts are rainbows, and they go to the end of the world -
Invisible branches, the stars are their tips!
Fruit! Fruit, the Lord seeks from created man,
By fruit only, He judges man's life.
When death shakes the tree, may the golden apples
Of your life fall into God's hands.
Then you will be able to say, "I was not in vain -
Because of beautiful reality, I dreamed an ugly dream!"

REFLECTION

The Christian Faith is the only Faith in the world that has one determined and never changing standard of values. About how it [Christianity] measures and classifies its values, St. John Chrysostom speaks clearly. He says, **"Things have a three-fold distinction: the first are good and cannot be evil, for example: wisdom, charity and the like; the second are evil and can never be good, for example: perversion, inhumanity and cruelty. The third, at times becomes this or at times becomes that, whenever, according to the disposition of those who make use of it."** This divine teacher explains, "how riches and poverty, and freedom and slavery, and power and disease and even death itself fall into the neutral distinction which, are neither good nor evil by themselves, but become either this or that according to the disposition of men and according to the use which men make of them. For example, if riches were good and poverty evil, then all rich men would be good and all the poor would be evil. However, we are daily convinced that as there are good and evil rich men, so also are there good and evil poor men. The same can be applied to the healthy and the sick, to the free and the enslaved, to the satiated and the hungry, to those who are in authority and to those under subjugation. Even death is not evil for the martyrs, through death, became more fortunate than all."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as **"a City set on a mountain" (St. Matthew 5:14):**

1. As a City on the mountain of the Higher Zion [Heavenly Zion]; that is, above the created world in the kingdom of eternity;
2. As a City on the mountain of human history;
3. As a City on the mountain of my own life; that is, on the peak of my ideals; on the zenith of my thoughts and yearnings.

HOMILY

-About understanding through doing-

**"Whoever chooses to do His will [God's Will]
shall know whether my teaching is from God"
(St. John 7:17).**

It benefits little to prove by human logic and words that the teaching of Christ is the teaching from God. The fastest and most reliable way to know this is truth is to do the will of God in the same way that Christ proclaimed it and testified to it. Whosoever would do this, that one will know that the teaching of Christ is the teaching from God.

If you cry for the sake of God, you will know what kind of comfort He is. If you are merciful, you know the mercy of God. If you build peace, you will know how it becomes you to be called the Son of God. If you forgive men, you will know God forgives you.

Never can anyone be able to know that the teaching of Christ is the teaching from God, except he who does the Will of God. For only doing the Will of God, fulfilling the commandments of God, that is the key for unlocking Paradise in which God is seen. That is the key for understanding Holy Scripture and all the mysteries of revelation.

St. Basil writes: "In order to understand that which is hidden in Sacred Scripture, purity of life is needed."

What else does the Lord want from us when He teaches us that through doing His will, we arrive at the understanding of the divinity of His teaching? He simply wants that we, by our deeds, become convinced of the divinity of His teaching. He does not want that we be convinced of this in an easy manner, but rather in a more difficult manner, not only by listening but by doing, because whoever is convinced in an easy manner will easily waver and change his mind and for him who is convinced in a difficult manner, it would be difficult for him to change his mind. Brethren, that is why we must endeavor to fulfill the Will of God in order that we may know God and save our soul.

O Lord, All-Wise, help us by the power of Your Holy Spirit to do Your will.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 22 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE TIMOTHY

Timothy was one of the Seventy Apostles. He was born in Lystra in Lycaonia of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. The Apostle Paul praised his mother and grandmother because of their sincere faith. **" I yearn to see you again, recalling your tears, so that I may be filled with joy, as I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and that, I am confident, lives also in you" (II Timothy 1: 4-5).** Timothy first met with the great apostle in Lystra and was himself a witness when Paul healed the one lame from birth. Later, Timothy was an almost constant traveling companion of Paul, traveling with him to Achaia, Macedonia, Italy and Spain. Sweet in soul, he was a great zealot for the Faith, and a superb preacher. Timothy contributed much to the spreading and establishing of the Christian Faith. Paul calls him **"my own son in the faith."** **"Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus, Who is our hope, to Timothy, my own son in the Faith: grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Timothy 1: 1-2).** After Paul's martyrdom, Timothy had St. John the Evangelist as his teacher. But when the Emperor Domentian banished John from Ephesus to the island of Patmos, Timothy remained in Ephesus to serve as bishop. During the time of an idolatrous feast called Katagogium, the pagans, resentful of the Christians, treacherously and in disguise, attacked Timothy and killed him about the year 93 A.D. Later his honorable relics were translated to Constantinople and interred in the Church of the Twelve Apostles along side of the grave of St. Luke the Evangelist and St. Andrew the First-called.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYR ANASTASIUS

Anastasius was a Persian by birth. His pagan name was Magundat. When Emperor Heraclius warred with the Persians, Magundat deserted to the Christians, went to Jerusalem where he was baptized and received the name Anastasius. It was not enough for him to be baptized, but, in order to give himself completely to serving the Lord he was also tonsured a monk. Among his other mortifications, Anastasius joyfully read the hagiography of the holy martyrs and in reading them he moistened the book with his tears and ardently yearned for martyrdom. The Lord finally crowned him with the martyr's wreath. In prison for a long time, he was cruelly tortured, until Emperor Chozroes pronounced the death sentence. After that death sentence, Anastasius was suffocated under water and after being removed from the water, the executioner beheaded him and sent his head to the emperor. He suffered on January 22, 628 A.D., in the town of Bethsaloe near Nineveh.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TIMOTHY

Holy Apostles warmed by the Spirit,
Spiritual athletes, illumined by the Spirit,
By the victory of Christ, they conquered the world,
They conquered the world and established the Church.
As giant eagles, they flew mightily,
In torment and in death, they raced bravely;
From the world, they easily departed,
From Christ, they were never able to separate.
Their love for Christ separated them from everything,
Their love for Christ glorified them for all ages.
They were ridiculed at times, by worldly tyrants,
Now, they are crowned with the glow of eternal day:
Ridiculed at times, by worldly sages,
And now, brothers of angels and leaders of the saints!
Pray for us, O eagles of Christ,
So that Christ may restore us sinners with the Spirit.
Saint Timothy, star among stars,
Help even us by your prayers.

REFLECTION

The Orthodox Church possesses an inexhaustible treasure in proofs of life after death. One of the numerous proofs is cited here: one example, which, at the same time, witnesses that the souls of men live after physical death and that voluntary obedience leads to blessed eternity. When St. Theodosius the Great founded a monastery, he had only seven monks in the beginning. In order to confirm these monks in remembrance of death, he ordered them to dig out a grave. When the grave was finished, Theodosius stood above the grave surrounded by the seven monks, and said, "Behold my children the grave is ready! Are there any among you who is ready for death, in order to be buried in this grave?" One of them, Basil by name and a priest by rank, fell to his knees and sought a blessing from Theodosius to die. Theodosius ordered that a memorial service for the soul be held for Basil: the third, the ninth and the fortieth day as is the custom for the deceased. When the fortieth day memorial service was completed, Basil completely healthy, laid down and died. He was buried in the new grave. On the fortieth day after his burial, Basil appeared among the brethren in church one morning and chanted with them. In the beginning, only Theodosius saw him and he prayed to God that He open the eyes of the others. The entire brotherhood looked and saw Basil among them. One brother, Letius, out of joy spread his arms and wanted to embrace Basil, but he vanished and Letius heard Basil's voice saying; "Save yourselves, fathers and brothers, save yourselves."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the lack of concern by the Lord Jesus with regard to food and clothing:

1. His lack of concern about Himself which He shows in His works;
2. His lack of concern about food and clothing which He preached to others. **"So do not worry and say, 'what are we to eat?' or 'what are we to drink?' or 'what are we to wear?' " (St. Matthew 6:31).**

HOMILY

-About God's omniscience and providence-

"Even all the hairs of your head are counted" (St. Matthew 10:30).

Brethren, **"the hairs of your head are counted"** much less the days of your life! Do not be afraid, therefore, that you will die before your appointed time nor yet hope that you will somehow be able to extend your life for one day against the will of Him Who counts and measures. Let this knowledge teach you meekness and fear of God.

"The hairs of your head are counted" much less your sufferings on earth! Do not be afraid, therefore, that you will suffer more beyond measure. Fear even less that your sufferings will remain forgotten and unaccounted for by Him Who sees all. This knowledge will teach you patience and confidence toward your Creator and Provider.

"The hairs of your head are counted" much less your friends and enemies on earth! Do not be afraid, therefore, that you will have either too many friends or too many enemies. Neither be afraid that your enemies will overcome you nor be assured that your friends will defend you. Concern yourself only that you have God for a friend and do not be afraid of anything. Behold, He is your only friend Who loves you without change.

O Good Lord, Wise Provider Who knows the number, measure and time of all, banish from us every fear, except the fear of You. That through fear of You, we may arrive to the pure and holy love toward You, our Creator and Benefactor.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ANCYRA

Clement was born in the year 258 A.D. in the city of Ancyra of a pagan father and a Christian mother. His devout mother Euphrosyne prophesied that her son would die a martyr's death and then she departed this world when Clement was twelve years old. Her friend Sophia took Clement to her home as a son and assisted in rearing him in the Christian spirit. Clement was so famous because of his virtuous living that he was elected bishop of Ancyra at the age of twenty. In his young years, he attained the wisdom of a mature adult, and by great restraint he tamed and conquered his body. Clement fed on bread and vegetables only and did not eat anything butchered or bloody. During the reign of Diocletian, he was tortured so horribly "as no one ever, since the beginning of the world." He spent twenty-eight years in difficulties and in dungeons. Eleven different torturers tormented and tortured him. At one time, when they struck him in the face, spat upon him and broke his teeth, he cried out to Domentian, his torturer: "You do me great honor, O Domentian, for you are not torturing me, because even the mouth of my Lord Jesus Christ was also beaten and struck in the face and behold, I, the unworthy, now became worthy of that!" When Clement was brought to Rome before Emperor Diocletian, the emperor placed various weapons on one side for torture and on the other side gifts, such as decorations [medals], clothing and money; all that the emperor could bestow, and then he told Clement to choose. The martyr of Christ glanced with scorn at all the emperor's gifts and chose the instruments of torture. Clement was indescribably tortured: piece by piece they removed the flesh from his body so that the white bones showed beneath the flesh. Finally, he was beheaded by a soldier in Ancyra while, as bishop, he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy in church in the year 312 A.D. The miracles of St. Clement are without number.

2. THE SIXTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL [CONSTANTINOPLE, 680 A.D.]

The first session was held in Constantinople in the first half of the year 681 A.D., and the second session was held in the second half of the year 691 A.D. This Council condemned the Monothelite heresy, which erroneously taught that in Christ there was only one divine will and not a human will. Along with this, the Council passed several canons concerning the order and discipline of the clergy.

3. SAINT PAULINUS THE MERCIFUL

At first, Paulinus was a Roman senator and afterwards, a bishop in Nola. He followed the example of his friend St. Ambrose and received baptism. Following his baptism, Paulinus withdrew to Spain and into the Pyrenees mountains where he lived a life of asceticism. But as no lighted lamp can be hidden, so also St. Paulinus was discovered and elected as Bishop of Nola. He was a good and merciful shepherd. He died peacefully in the year 431 A.D. His relics repose in the Church of St. Bartholomew in Rome.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TO THE CREATOR

With my soul, I bow before You, O Infinite Creator,
When I speak Your Name, I belittle You,
And, with my every thought, I belittle You with mine -
What is the mind able to think before the open sea of Your spaciousness?
What can the tongue say, when it must remain silent
Before Your awesome mountains and chasms?
Before Your immeasurable height and width,
Before Your straight places, slopes, depths and distance
And closeness, O God; O yes, even closeness!
And still, more miraculous, Your humble lowliness!
You, as a man, lowered Yourself into our lowliness,
Lowered and constrained Yourself into a mortal valley,
That You raise the valley to the heavenly firmament,
And worn-out creation to turn into new.
Of all the characteristics, Your lowliness
Halts my thought, You bind my lips!
What can I think, what can I say
About the hungry, thirsty and crucified God?
What can I say to You, the richest One,
That, because of me, You became the poorest One?
Let the tongue keep silent; let the tears speak;
Save, with Your mercy, what Your thought created.

REFLECTION

Compassion has always been a characteristic of a true shepherd of Christ's flock. **St. John Chrysostom** in his glorious homilies did not emphasize or underscore anything more strongly than compassion. **St. John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria**, wept every day when the opportunity was not given to him to show compassion to someone. **St. Paulinus** deserved to be called the Merciful, for in truth, he was compassionate in the full Christian sense of that word. Once, when the Vandals looted Nola, they seized many men into slavery. A certain widow whose only son the Vandal Prince Rig had taken into slavery, came to her bishop and, weeping, sought money from him to pay the ransom for her son. Not possessing anything, Bishop Paulinus dressed in the clothes of a simple man and asked the widow to take him before the prince and to exchange him for her son. The prince released the widow's son and took Paulinus with him to Africa where Paulinus served as the prince's gardener until, by God's Providence, he was freed and returned to Nola with the other slaves.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as Healer:

1. As a Healer of bodily infirmities;
2. As an Exorcist of evil spirits from the insane;
3. As a Healer of the human spirit and mind by the light of divine teaching;
4. As my own Healer of all pains and evils.

HOMILY

-About the angelic state of the saints-

"But those who are deemed worthy to attain the comingage - they can no longer die, for they are like angels" (St. Luke 20:35-36).

Thus speaks He Who knows, He Who saw and He Who cannot be deceived. Brethren, what have we to doubt anymore? This testimony is clearer than a summer's noon, harder than diamonds and more precious than all the riches of this world; and this is the testimony: Those who are **"deemed worthy"** of that world and resurrection **"can no longer die"** but are immortal as angels of God.

What are the angels like? Those same angels who appeared at the time of Abraham and assisted men are the same ones [angels] who, today, appear and assist men. They are not dead but alive; they have not grown old, but they are young. They are the same ones [angels] who beheld Adam in Paradise and who will behold the Final Resurrection and the Judgment and the Kingdom of the Saints.

The righteous are similar to angels. The apostles, prophets, saints and martyrs live even today and will live always and **"no longer can they die."** Hundreds and thousands of years pass but they cannot die nor age anymore, rather **"they are like angels."**

That the righteous will be crowned with immortality, that the Lord testified to us in the above words and showed this by His own resurrection and proved through His glorified saints.

O, my brethren, let us awaken and labor to become worthy to obtain that blessed world!

O, resurrected and immortal Lord, help us to become worthy of Your immortal kingdom in which You reign with Your angels and Your saints throughout the ages of ages!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 24 -

1. THE VENERABLE FEMALE XENIA [KSENIA]

Xenia was born in Rome, the only daughter of a prominent senator. Drawn by love for Christ, she refused to enter into marriage as her parents wished, but rather, to avoid this, she secretly fled from her home with two of her slaves and arrived at the Island of Cos to a place called Mylassa. There she founded a convent for virgins where she lived an ascetical life until her death. Even though she was a frail woman, she possessed a steadfast endurance in fasting, prayer and all-night vigils. She often stood all night in prayer; she was dressed more poorly than all the other sisters; and the bread which she ate, she often sprinkled with ashes from the censer [thurible]. At the time of her death (450 A.D.), a wonderful sign appeared over the virgin's convent: a wreath of stars with a cross in the center, brighter than the sun. Many, who were sick, received healing from her relics. Her female slaves [tonsured nuns] continued in the example of their abbess and when they died, and according to their wishes, were buried at the feet of Blessed Xenia [Ksenia].

2. THE HOLY-PRIEST MARTYR BABYLAS

Babylas was a priest in Sicily. He suffered for Christ with two of his disciples in the third century.

3. THE VENERABLE MACEDONIUS

Macedonius was a Syrian hermit. Only in his old age did he feed on baked bread, but before that he ate only grains of barley softened with water. He ended his earthy life in the year 418 A.D.

4. VENERABLE PHILON, BISHOP OF CYPRUS

When St. Epiphanius was summoned to Rome to assist the sister of the Emperor Honorius by his prayer, he consecrated Philon a bishop. Philon exegeted the Pentateuch and the Song of Songs. He died peacefully in the fifth century.

5. THE VENERABLE DIONYSIUS OF OLYMPUS

Dionysius was a miracle-worker. He lived an ascetical life on Mt. Olympus. He was tonsured a monk on Mt. Athos [The Holy Mountain] where he was the abbot of the Monastery Philotheou. Toward the end of his life, he withdrew into solitude on Mt. Olympus where he died in the sixteenth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT XENIA [KSENIA]

The virgin Xenia, as well as Agnes
Or the all-glorious Thecla or Anastasia,
Did not want to be tied to a physical man
But found a Bridegroom in the Immortal Christ.
With all her soul, she loved His beauty
And mercy and tenderness and radiant purity.
And even the senator's house and wealth, she left
When the Sun of Righteousness shown in her soul.
Soul! Soul ! Soul! is the true bride;
And the body is miserable like the transient grass.
And the bride [her soul] Xenia began to adorn
And by many prayers to wash and nourish it
That the bride [her soul], to be a heavenly apparition,
Pleasant and worthy of the Heavenly Bridegroom.
The labors of Holy Xenia were pleasing to the Bridegroom,
And many wondrous gifts, upon her, He bestowed.
When her pure soul, the flesh, overcame,
Peaceful as a king over a vanquished city,
With the wreath of immortality, the Lord crowned her,
Into the mansion of eternal joy, led her.
There, where the angels hymn the Creator in song,
There, the Lord receives His bride.

REFLECTION

In our day, you usually hear these words from parents: "We want to secure the life of our child." That is why they work very hard to amass wealth, often unjustly, to educate their child in the calling [vocation] which brings the greatest physical security and material benefit. This is done by so-called Christians! They do this because their concept of a real life and the real security of life is erroneous. See, how a true Christian mother prepares her son for a real life. At the time of her death, Blessed Euphrosyne spoke to her son Clement of Ancyra: "Do me the honor, O my son, and bravely stand up for Christ and confess Him strongly and without hesitation! I hope, in my heart, that the crown of martyrdom will blossom on you in my honor and for the salvation of many. Do not be afraid of threats, nor swords, nor pains, nor wounds, nor fire. Let nothing separate you from Christ, but look up to heaven and from there await your great, eternal and rich reward from God. Fear God's majesty; be afraid of

His awesome judgment, tremble at His all-seeing Eye, for all those who deny Him will receive the punishment of unquenchable fire and eternally vigilant worm. Let this be my reward from you, my sweet son, for my pain in child-bearing and effort surrounding your education that I may be called a mother of a martyr. The blood that you received from me, do not spare but shed it that, from that, I can also receive honor. Submit your body to torture that I, too, may rejoice at that before our Lord as though I myself had suffered for Him."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as Teacher:

1. As a Teacher Who teaches how man should think in order to be saved;
2. As a Teacher Who teaches how man should talk in order to be saved;
3. As a Teacher Who teaches how a man should act in order to be saved.

HOMILY

-About the most all-discerning Prophet [Jesus]-

**"Why do you harbor evil thoughts in your hearts"
(St. Matthew 9:4)**

When our Lord deigned to direct a rebuke to the Pharisees and Scribes, at that time, they had not killed anyone, nor had they deceived anyone, nor had they looted anyone and, not only that, at that time, they had not even offended anyone by their words. Why then, did our Lord admonish them when they had not committed any sin neither in works nor in words? Why? Because, at that time, their thoughts were evil.

An evil thought is sin! That is the great news which Christ brought into the world. In truth, an evil thought is the sinful source of all sin because, before a man says something or does something sinful, he thinks sinfully. Thought is the causative sin. All other sins are only subsequent sins. Whoever wishes to annihilate those evil actions must uproot those evil thoughts first. Whoever desires to stem the flow of water must first dry up the source. Therefore, let no one justify himself: I am not a sinner, for I have not killed anyone nor looted from anyone nor profaned anyone nor lied to anyone! Behold, we are full of deadly looting, profaning and deceiving thoughts! If we have not committed sin by our own deeds, that is simply a matter of the mercy of God and external circumstances. But, if God had yielded and if the circumstances were favorable, we would have committed all those sins that we had thought. The serpent is not only venomous when it bites but also when it does not bite, because it carries the venom in itself.

Therefore, not only is thought a sin, but also it is the source of sin: the beginning of sin and the seed and root of sin. That is why the All-seeing and All-knowing Lord rebuked those who had evil thoughts. **"Why do you harbor evil thoughts in your hearts."**

O Lord, All-seeing and All-knowing, help us to cleanse our hearts and minds from evil thoughts so that our words and deeds may be pure.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. ST GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Gregory was born in Nazianzus of a Greek father and a Christian mother. Before his baptism, he studied in Athens along with Basil the Great and Julian the Apostate. Gregory often prophesied that Julian would become an apostate and a persecutor of the Church which actually happened. Gregory was especially influenced greatly by his good mother Nonna. When he completed his studies, Gregory was baptized. St. Basil consecrated him as bishop of Sasima, and Emperor Theodosius the Great summoned him to fill the vacant archepiscopal throne of Constantinople. He wrote numerous works of which his most famous are those concerning theology for which he is called The Theologian. Especially known because of its depth is his work: **Homilies on The Holy Trinity**. Gregory wrote against the heretic Macedonius who erroneously taught that the Holy Spirit is a creation of God and, Gregory also wrote against Appolinarius who erroneously taught that Christ did not have a human soul but that His divinity was in lieu of His soul. Additionally Gregory wrote against Emperor Julian the Apostate, his one-time colleague in school. In 381 A.D., when a debate began regarding his election as archbishop, he withdrew on his own and issued a statement: "Those, who deprive us of our archepiscopal throne cannot deprive us of God." After that, he left Constantinople and went to Nazianzus and there lived a life of solitude and prayer, writing worthwhile books. Even though he was in poor health throughout his entire life, nevertheless, Gregory lived to be eighty years old. His relics were later transferred to Rome. A reliquary containing his head reposes in the Cathedral Church of the Assumption in Moscow. He was, and remains, a great and wonderful light of the Orthodox Church as much by his meekness and purity of character as well as for the unsurpassable depth of his mind. He died in the Lord in the year 390 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE PUBLIUS

At first, Publius was a senator. Recognizing the light of Christ, he left his worldly honors, distributed his possessions to the poor and devoted himself to a life of asceticism in the proximity of his town Zeguma on the Euphrates river. He established two monastic communities and died in the year 380 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE MARES

Mares was distinguished by external beauty and a sweet-sounding voice. He withdrew from the world and lived in a hut for thirty-seven years, in fasting and cleansing the heart of impure thoughts. As a ninety-year old man, Mares died in the Lord in the year 430 A.D.

4. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR FELICITAS AND HER SEVEN SONS

As a Christian, Felicitas was condemned to death along with her seven sons during the reign of Emperor Antoninus in the year 164 A.D. She implored God only that she not to be killed before her sons, so that she might be able to encourage them during their torture and death in order that they would not deny Christ. According to God's Providence, it so happened. With joy, this superb mother accompanied her sons one by one until she had witnessed the death of all seven sons. Then, she herself, with gratitude to God, received a martyr's death. She and her sons suffered in Rome where their relics repose.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT FELICITAS

Felicitas prayed to God;
"I have a crown of seven pearls,
I wish to wrap them in purple,
And, in purple, to present them to You;
O dear Lord, receive these gifts!"
Seven sons; seven pearls,
And purplish-red, the blood of the martyrs,
The prayer of the mother ascended
And as incense reached before God.
The Roman emperor sentenced her sons
To bitter death and bitter tortures;
The mother willingly; all were amazed at her!
Felicitas encouraged her sons:
"This is why I gave birth to you, my children,
This is why I nursed you, my children,
So that I can make a gift of you to God.
For God gave (gifted) you to me."
This, having been said, the executioner began his work:
The first fell, the mother bowed;
The second fell, the mother bowed twice;
The third fell, the mother bowed thrice;
With the fourth, four times she bowed;
The fifth fell, five times she bowed;
The sixth fell, six times she bowed;
The seventh fell, seven times she bowed;
The mother bowing, gave thanks to God;
The eighth time she bowed for herself,
And, on the block, she rested her head,
The sword glistened; her head decapitated -
The mother kissed her children in Paradise.

REFLECTION

They deceive themselves who speak self-confidently that they know men well enough and that they do not allow themselves to be deceived. Who can know what kind of spirit is in man except only God, Who knows the secrets of the heart? Even the great saints were mistaken about people. **For example:** for a long time **St. Basil** considered a certain hypocritical heretic as a holy man and defended him from many attackers until finally, convinced of the heretic's falseness, Basil was bitterly disappointed. **St. Gregory the Theologian** had baptized a certain philosopher, Maximus by name, and liked him so much that he kept the philosopher in his home, sharing his table with him. However, this Maximus, was as dangerous and cunning as a serpent. After a period of time, through intrigue and bribes, he obtained recognition of some Constantinopolians as patriarch, in place of St. Gregory. When this temptation, after great confusion, was removed, some rebuked Gregory for keeping his greatest enemy with him. The saint replied: "We are not to blame if we do not discern someone's evil. God alone knows the inner secrets of man. And to us is commanded by law, that with fatherly love, to open our hearts to all who come to us." A non-malevolent man cannot easily understand the malice of a malevolent man.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as King:

1. As the Lord over nature which He tames and places it [nature] in service to Himself;
2. As the Lord over demons, over disease and over death;
3. As the Lord over the immortal kingdom of angels and saints.

HOMILY

-About Who is Christ?-

"Who do people say that I am?" (St. Mark 8:27).

Brethren, it is almost two-thousand years from that day when our Lord Jesus posed this question to His disciples. From then until today, this question is put to every generation of man, every bright day and every dark night: And every generation of man and every bright day and every dark night had to give an answer to this question. This question is the question of life or death and the answer to it is life-bearing or death-bearing. **"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (St. Matthew 16:16)**, the Apostle Peter responded. And that reply was approved and praised by the Lord Jesus.

"Who is Christ?" men say today. **Some say**, along with the Jews, that He is the destroyer of the Law and the self-styled Messiah. **Others say**, along with Pilate, that they in general cannot arrive at the truth about this man. **The third say**, along with the apostles, that **He is Christ**, the Son of the Living God, Savior, Redeemer of the human race from sin and death, the Resurrected and the Resurrector, the Living-One and the Life-giver. And all of us who are baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity agree with the apostles and the Holy, Apostolic Church which, with her universal voice, thus confesses Christ the Lord.

O Lord, Only-begotten Son of God, help us, that we may, all the days of our life, believe in You in our hearts and confess You with our lips as our God and our Savior **"as the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:24).**

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 26 -

1. THE VENERABLE XENOPHONT AND MARIA AND THEIR SONS JOHN AND ARCADIUS

They were prominent and wealthy citizens of Constantinople. Xenophont and his wife Maria lived a God-pleasing life and dedicated all their attention to the Christian upbringing of their sons. When their sons reached majority, they were sent to study in Beirut; but it so happened that a storm capsized their boat. By the Providence of God, John and Arcadius were somehow saved. They were tossed ashore by the waves but in two different places so that each thought the other was drowned. Out of grief for each other, they both became monks in two different monasteries. After two years, their grieving parents came to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage to pay homage before the holy shrines. There, with the help of the "discernment" of a spiritual father, first the brothers met and, after that, the parents with their children. Out of gratitude to God, Xenophont and Maria distributed their entire estate to the poor and both of them were tonsured. The history of these four souls is touching and it shows how the Lord wonderfully guides the fate of those who believe in Him; how He permits pain and sorrow upon them that they may, later on, be strengthened in faith, in order to lead them into still greater joy. They lived and died in the Lord in the fifth century.

2. VENERABLE SIMEON THE OLD ONE [VETNI]

Simeon was a companion and friend of St. Paladius. From his early youth until his death, Simeon lived a life of asceticism in a cave. He established two monasteries and died in the Lord in the year 390 A.D. He is called the Old One or Vetni to distinguish him from Simeon the Stylite who, lived an ascetical life much later.

3. SAINT DAVID, EMPEROR OF THE GEORGIANS (1089-1130 A.D.)

David renewed and strengthened the State of Georgia. As a great zealot for the Christian Faith, he built many new churches and restored the old ones throughout Georgia. David is considered as the regenerator of the Orthodox Faith in Georgia.

HYMN OF PRAISE

**In this strange world, we are exiled,
In a dungeon with royal sons, slaves
Wayward children in sorrow seek their father
The strange world calls them to satiate them with sweetness.
Where will the spirits of the heroes be appeased
In a strange world, whose every sweetness is death?
In a strange world, which breathes death and smells of death,
That which is written in the morning is erased at night.
And the exiled crown prince sighs for the kingdom,
For the immortal kingdom, high above the firmament,
Where the Father rules and nothing is strange,
Where nothing is known about death neither moldy smell.
O, all-amazing world, a frightening cage!
Whoever is bound to Christ, breaks your ties,
And becomes free of everything and everyone,
That one neither goes with you nor flees from you,
But prepares worthily to depart from you
Into the arms of the Father, into the kingdom of freedom.**

REFLECTION

The greatest treasure of any realm is the saintly and good men who live in it. Compared to this wealth, all other wealth is as nothing. Devout Christian emperors considered holy men in their realms as the greatest of God's blessing. The holy Emperor Constantine the Great spoke: "I give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ that in my days there exist three divine lights: Blessed Abba Anthony, Abba Elenius and Abba Euchius." Before the battle of Kulikovo, crucial for the Russians, the devout Prince Dimitri of Don, with his chief assistants and dukes, went to the forest of Radonez to seek out the Venerable Sergius and implored his intercession before God. Even though the prince prepared his army for a liberating war against the Tartars, somehow, he placed greater hope in the prayers of one holy man than in a vast army and many weapons.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as Prophet:

1. As a Prophet Who clearly prophesied to individuals (as to: Peter, John and Judas and the other apostles) that which will happen to them in the future;
2. As a Prophet Who clearly prophesied the future of Jerusalem and other cities, the Jewish people and the Church of God;
3. As a Prophet Who clearly prophesied the end of the world and His Second Coming.

HOMILY

-About the confusion of those darkened by sin-

"Who is this Who even forgives sins" (St. Luke 7:49).

Thus asked the unrepentant sinners: **"Who is this [Jesus Christ]?" This is He Who** mostly feels the sting of human sin; upon Whom all the sins of mankind fall as blows. This is He Who, at one time in Paradise, looked upon man as sinless. **This is He Who** created man without sin, and **This is He Who** Himself is without sin from always and forever.

Only He can forgive who can also seek revenge. The strong man seeks revenge by reprisal. The weak man seeks revenge by hatred. If you are able to return the delivered blow and you do not do it, does not mean that you forgave until you uproot the root of anger from your heart. Great is the One Lord Who can also seek revenge and forgive. Great is He in His justice for He will seek revenge on the unrepentant sinner. Great is He in His mercy for He will forgive the penitent sinner.

Oh, if only men would know the power of the forgiveness of sins! Behold, when the sins of the blind man were forgiven, he saw. When the sins of the deaf man were forgiven, he heard. When the sins of the hunchbacked woman were forgiven, she stood erect. When the sins of the woman with the issue of blood were forgiven, she also was healed. When the sins of the man afflicted by insanity were forgiven, he became sane. When the sins of the man possessed with demons were forgiven, he was freed. When the sins of the prostitute were forgiven, she too was cleansed. When the sins of the dead man were forgiven, he also became alive!

Oh, how terrible is the chain of sins! How heavy are the chains of many sins! These chains are not loosened by sinful hands. But when the hands of the All-Pure Lord touches them, they, of their own accord, become loosened and fall apart. When the voice of the Pure One reaches them, they fall apart. And, from the glance of the Pure One, they fall apart. Yes, even from the thoughts of the Pure One, they fall apart - these terrible chains of sins.

"Who is this Who even forgives sins?" O sinners, this is the All-Pure Lord and because of purity, Almighty.

O, Lord, All-Pure and Almighty free us from the chains of sins

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen..

JANUARY - 27 -

1. SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, THE GOLDEN TRUMPET OF ORTHODOXY

The memory of this illuminary of the Church is celebrated on November 13 and January 30 but, on this date, the Church celebrates the translation of his honorable relics from the Armenian village of Comana, where he died in exile, to Constantinople, where earlier he had governed the Church. Thirty years after his death, Patriarch Proculus delivered a homily in memory of his spiritual father and teacher. He so enflamed the love of the people and Emperor Theodosius the Younger toward this great saint that all of them desired that Chrysostom's relics be translated to Constantinople. It was said that the sarcophagus, containing the relics of St. John Chrysostom, did not allow itself to be moved from its resting place until the emperor wrote a letter to Chrysostom begging him for forgiveness (for Theodosius' mother, Eudoxia, was the culprit responsible for the banishment of this saint) and appealing to him to come to Constantinople, his former residence. When this letter of repentance was placed on the sarcophagus, its weight became extremely light. At the time of the translation of his relics, many who were ill and who touched the sarcophagus were healed. When the relics arrived in the capital, then the emperor in the name of his mother as though she herself was speaking over the relics, again, prayed to the saint for forgiveness. "While I lived in this transient life, I did you malice and, now, when you live the immortal life, be beneficial to my soul. My glory passed away and it helped nothing. Help me, father; in your glory, help me before I am condemned at the Judgment of Christ!" When the saint was brought into the Church of the Twelve Apostles and placed on the patriarchal throne, the masses of people heard the words from St. Chrysostom's mouth saying: "Peace be to you all." The translation of the relics of St. John Chrysostom was accomplished in the year 438 A.D.

2. VENERABLE TITUS OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

At first, Titus was a soldier. When in battle he sustained a head injury, Titus withdrew from the world to the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev where he was healed and then was tonsured a monk. Titus spent his time in unceasing mourning for his earlier sins. Before his death Titus was informed through a heavenly apparition that all of his sins were forgiven. His relics repose in the Caves of Theodosius.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Saint John, a trumpet forged of gold,
Heralded to mankind, the mercy of God,
Miraculous mercy, which even loves the sinners,
Wonderful mercy, that shines through the sun,
And with the moon, amazes the earth,
In the cradle of the stars, mercy, he is rocking,
The awesome mercy from bloody Golgatha,
Where God Crucified forgives the crime of the world,
Mercy of fear, forgiveness and glory,
Mercy which the angels sing,
Of which the whole of creation drinks,
Which only the saints glorify,
Mercy which is a balm to the ill,
Joy to the simple, foolishness to the scribes,
Antidote for the proud and a punishment for the vain;
The mercy of God, which all creation enjoys,
Which is poured out like a current of air,
Mercy that covers all sins -
Such mercy - unknown until Christ,
Eternal glow, from Christ radiated.
O Teacher of God's mercy,
Pray to God that He forgives our sins.

REFLECTION

Fasting is a great thing but love is even greater. If by fasting demons are cast out, passions tamed, the body pacified, the spirit composed then, by love, God takes up abode in man. The Lord Himself emphasized fasting as necessary but stressed love as the main commandment. In the first half of the last century, Jeladin Bey ruled in Ohrid, a renegade from the Sultan and an independent ruler. At that time, the Church was governed by Metropolitan Kalinikos. Even though of different faiths, Jeladin Bey and Kalinikos were very good friends and often visited one another. It happened that Jeladin Bey condemned twenty-five Christians to be hanged. They were scheduled to be hanged on Great and Holy Friday [Good Friday]. The Metropolitan, totally disturbed because of this incident, went to Jeladin Bey and began to implore him to be more lenient with the punishment. While they were conversing, the time for lunch arrived and the Bey invited the Metropolitan to dine. Lamb was prepared for lunch. The Metropolitan excused himself, saying that because of fasting he could not remain for lunch, and he prepared to leave. The Bey was sorry and said to the Metropolitan: "Choose; either you will dine with me and free twenty-five men from the gallows, or you will not dine and allow them to be hanged." The Metropolitan crossed himself and sat down to eat and Jeladin freed the condemned from the punishment of death.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as High Priest:

1. Who offers to God as a sacrifice the entire time of His life on earth;
2. Who offers to God as a sacrifice His every word, His every feeling, His every thought, His every labor and His every tear;
3. Who finally offers Himself completely as a man to God for man.

HOMILY

-About the confusion of those of little faith-

"What sort of man is this Whom even the winds and the sea obey?" (St. Matthew 8:27).

In these words the apostles, not yet knowing the Lord Jesus and seeing how He calmed the turbulent sea and winds questioned: **"What sort of man is this Whom even the winds and the sea obey?"** This is He Who created the winds and the sea. Therefore, what kind of miracle is it that His own created things obey Him? Is not the axe an obedient tool in the hands of him who made it? The Lord created everything by His word, that is why all things submit to His word.

Brethren, **"What sort of man is this?"** Who is He? This is the same One Who, before that, raised the winds and quieted them and Who agitated the sea and subdued it. This is the same One Who also does that today . As a man, He stood before men and rebuked the animated wind and unbridled sea in order to dispel the confusion of men as though the winds and the sea are moved and calmed either by blind chance or by some evil power; to reveal the truth for ever that the wise and beneficial power of the Creator directs and commands all the elements according to His Providence.

The apostles questioned: **"Who is He?"** O, Holy Apostles, He is the sinless Son of God Whose Name you will spread throughout the whole world and for Whose Name you will be tortured and slain as lambs by wolves. Who are the wolves? The wolves are those who think that the wind moves on its own and that the sea agitates and calms itself on its own, either only of itself or of the devil. O, Holy Apostles, you who asked and who received a true reply and the whole truth you proclaimed to the whole world, pray for us so that we too may be enlightened by that truth.

O Lord, All-Wise and All-Powerful, calm the winds of sin and subdue the storm of our filthy and unworthy passions.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE EPHREM THE SYRIAN

Ephrem was born in Syria of poor parents during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great. He spent his young life rather tempestuously; but all at once a change took place in his soul and he began to burn with love for the Lord Jesus. Ephrem was a disciple of St. James Nisibis (January 13). From the enormous Grace of God, wisdom flowed from his tongue as a brook of honey and ceaseless tears flowed from his eyes. Industrious as a bee, Ephrem continually either wrote books or orally taught the monks in the monastery and the people in the town of Edessa or he dedicated himself to prayer and contemplation. Numerous are his books and beautiful are his prayers. The most famous is his prayer recited during the Honorable Fast Season which reads: **Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, vain curiosity, lust for power and idle talk.**

But give to me, your servant, a spirit of soberness, humility, patience and love. O Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and not to condemn my brother: for blessed are you to the ages of ages. Amen.

When they wanted to appoint him a bishop by force, he pretended to be insane and began to race through the city of Edessa dragging his garment behind him. Seeing this, the people left him in peace. Ephrem was a contemporary and friend of St. Basil the Great. **Saint Ephrem is considered mainly to be the Apostle of Repentance.** Even today his works soften many hearts hardened by sin and return them to Christ. He died in extreme old age in the year 378 A.D.

2. VENERABLE ISAAC THE SYRIAN

Isaac was born in Nineveh and in his youth lived an ascetical life in the Monastery of Mar [Saint] Matthew in the proximity of Nineveh. When Isaac became known because of the sanctity of his life and of his many miracles, he was elected bishop of Nineveh and was forced to accept that rank. But, after only five months, he left the bishopric and secretly withdrew into the wilderness to the Monastery of Rabban Shabur. He compiled many works of which about a hundred homilies on the spiritual life and asceticism, written primarily from his personal experience, have come down to us today. He was unequaled as a psychologist and as a director in the spiritual life. Even such saints as was St. Simeon [the New Stylite] of the Wonderful Mountain near Antioch sought counsel from him. Isaac died in extreme old age toward the end of the seventh century.

3. VENERABLE PALLADIUS, SYRIAN HERMIT

Palladius was a great ascetic and miracle-worker. In front of his cell there appeared a corpse of a certain wealthy man whom robbers had killed and looted. When Palladius was brought to court and, in order to be spared from misery, he prayed to God and through prayer resurrected the dead man. He died in the fourth century.

4. THE VENERABLE EPHREM OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Ephrem died in 1096 A.D. He instituted the **Feast of the Translation of the Relics of St. Nicholas to Bari, Italy.** This feast is celebrated on May 9.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EPHREM THE SYRIAN

In Ephrem, the heart burns
Out of love for Christ,
And Ephrem's tongue speaks of
The pure wisdom of the Gospel.
Ephrem, the honey-bearing bee,
Ephrem, the fruit-bearing rain!
With repentance, Ephrem breathes,
With tears, he proclaims repentance.
Ephrem writes: "Repent ye!
For God glorifies penitents!"
O wonderful leader and teacher,
By life and in books,
Ephrem, comforter to the sorrowful,
An awesome whip without cares,
Toward others, honey of mercy,
Toward himself, a sword of austerity.
Of Ephrem, the Church is proud,
The angels call him brother,
This even becomes Ephrem,
This ingratiating theologian,
The Church glorifies its Syrian,
The glorifier of God's Son.
Ephrem, the honey-bearing bee,
Ephrem, the fruit-bearing rain,
Intercessor, day and night,
Ephrem, the all-mighty monk!
Toward himself a sword of austerity,
Toward others, honey of mercy!
The Church glorifies its Syrian,
The glorifier of God's Son.

REFLECTION

The absence of envy among the saints is a startling and wonderful phenomenon. Not only did the saints not allow envy to seize their hearts but, with all their might, labored to uplift their companions and to diminish themselves. On one occasion when St. Hilarion of Palestine visited St. Anthony in Egypt, St. Anthony exclaimed: "Welcome Venus, the morning star!" To that St. Hilarion replied: "Greetings and health be to you, the shining pillar who sustains the universe!" When they praised St. Macarius as a monk, the saint replied: "Brethren, forgive me, I am not a monk but, I have seen monks!" When some people told St. Sisoës that he attained the same level of perfection as St. Anthony, Sisoës replied: "If only I had but a single thought as does Anthony, I would be all aflame."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Servant:

1. How He voluntarily descended among men to be a servant to all;
2. How He never refused anyone a good service which was requested of Him;
3. How, even today, as always, He invisibly and silently serves the whole world.

HOMILY

-About the Man Whom no one knows-

**" 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them: 'The beginning'
'(St. John 8:25).**

The Lord Jesus is the beginning of creation, the beginning of restoration, the beginning of salvation, the beginning of resurrection, and the beginning of immortal glory.

Wherever there is any evil in the world that needs to be uprooted, He is the beginning. Without Him, it is impossible. Wherever there is any good that is desired to be done in the world, He is the beginning. Without Him, it is impossible. If anyone desires to uproot dissent and malice in the family, in the village, in the town, in the entire world, without Him, it is impossible. One must begin with Him. If anyone desires to instill good-will, peace, love and unity in the family, in the village, in the town, among the peoples in the entire world, without Him it is impossible. He is the beginning.

Why is it that without Christ, one cannot uproot evil nor sow good? Because all evil is from sin and only He can forgive sins. When He and only He forgives sin, then sin is plucked out by the root. No type of good is possible to be sown without Him because in Him is the treasury of all good; all the seeds of good. He is the only Sower of Good in the field of the world.

The Apostle Paul, who understood all of this better than we, says: "**I can do all things through [Jesus] Christ Who strengthens me**" (**Philippians 4:13**). Without Jesus Christ, who can begin to heal oneself of evil, to heal others from evil and to sow good in oneself and to sow good in others? No one, truly no one.

Therefore, brethren, if we are determined to uproot evil in ourselves and in others and in place of evil to sow good in ourselves and in others, let us begin with the Beginning [Christ]; i.e., let us begin with the Conqueror over evil and the Sower of good; with the Lord Jesus Christ.

O Lord Jesus Christ, You be to us the beginning in every struggle against sin and in every good work.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JANUARY - 29 -

1. THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER, [THEOPHORUS]

The principal feast of St. Ignatius is celebrated in winter on December 20. On this date is commemorated the translation of his relics from Rome, where he suffered martyrdom, to Antioch where earlier he was a bishop. When St. Ignatius was summoned to Rome before Emperor Trajan to account for his faith, he was accompanied on this long journey by several citizens from Antioch who were motivated in this by a great love toward their wonderful Arch-shepherd. Since he would never deny his faith in Christ, this saint of God who abhorred all adulation and promises of Emperor Trajan, was condemned to death and was thrown into the Circus Maximus before wild beasts. The wild beasts tore him apart, and he gave up his soul to God. His companions then gathered his exposed bones and took them to Antioch and honorably buried them. But when the Persians captured Antioch in the sixth century, the relics of St. Ignatius were again translated from Antioch to Rome.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ROMANUS, JAMES, PHILOTHEUS, HYPERECHIUS, ABIBUS, JULIAN AND PARAGORIUS

They all suffered martyrdom for the Lord Jesus Christ in Samosata during the reign of Emperor Maximilian in the year 297 A.D. Philotheus and Hyperechius were aristocrats and the others were young men of noble birth. The pagans inflicted a terrible death upon them, hammering nails into the heads of each of them,. They suffered martyrdom honorably and entered into eternal joy.

3. VENERABLE LAWRENCE OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Lawrence voluntarily chose the life of a recluse following the examples of earlier recluses Isaac and Nicetas. However, he guarded against diabolical temptations which, in the beginning, befell the other two. With great restraint, prayer and godly-thoughts, Lawrence attained a high state of perfection. He learned from a terrified demon that of one-hundred eighteen monks in the Monastery of the Caves, thirty of them were given by God the authority over evil spirits. Lawrence presented himself to the Lord in the year 1194 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT IGNATIUS, [THEOPHORUS] THE GOD-BEARER

The bitter death of Christ dulled the stinger of death
And drove away for ever the irrational fear of death.
A flock of martyrs swarmed after Christ
In death - but, without fear, without complaints and without shrieks;
And many with rejoicing hurried to death
Because, before their deaths, they saw angels and heaven.
Saint Ignatius traveled to Rome;
Along the way, to the Living God, he prayed
As a son would pray to his parents,
That the teeth of the beasts grind him, grind him!
That for which he prayed to God, God granted him,
Behold, but the saint, having been ground, remained alive!
Alive and whole; until now, before the Table of Heaven
Bread made tender by torture for Christ -
Saint Ignatius, the courageous Theophorus,
Throughout the ages, he imparts courage to those being tortured.
There are two sufferings; there can only be two sufferings:
For justice or for sins, this cannot be hidden.
Pain for one's sins is pain without hope,
But pain for justice is joy without sorrow.
As a light through rain that decorates the rainbow
Thus, the joy, through tears and through gentle sorrow,
On the spiritual heaven, Paradise and God is pictured -
That strengthens the souls of the holy martyrs.

REFLECTION

The more a man advances in spiritual knowledge and in purification of the heart, the more it appears to him that the depth in which he finds himself is even lower and that the height to which he strives is even higher. When one spiritual giant on his death bed heard that his companions were praising him because of his great asceticism, he began to weep and said, "My children, I have not even begun my spiritual life." When St. Ignatius, that God-bearer, lay chained in the dungeon, he wrote to the Ephesians: "I do not command you as though I stand for something. Even though I am in chains for the Name of Jesus Christ; nevertheless, I still have not perfected myself in Him. Now I am beginning to be His disciple, and I speak to you as a collegium of my teachers."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus on the simplicity of His behavior:

1. How He behaved simply with fishermen as well as with the scribes and princes;
2. How He responds to everyone and enters into the home of everyone who invites Him;
3. How His royal dignity clearly radiates through all the simplicity of His behavior.

HOMILY

-About perfection through the fulfilling of the will of God-

"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of the One Who sent Me and to finish His work' " (St. John 4:34).

Here is a saving example given to us by our Savior! He Who had such power, authority and wisdom says that He came into the world, not to do His will but the will of the Father and not to do His work but the work of His Father; but we, even though we are as weak as a cobweb, continuously emphasize our will and some, our work! Although the Son is equal to the Father as He says in another place: **"The Father and I are one" (St. John 10:30)**; nevertheless, the Lord Jesus says that He came into the world to do His Father's will and to accomplish His Father's will. He is saying this not in order show the smallness of His being before the Father's being, for their being is one, but rather to show the greatness of His love toward the Father, and in order to motivate us, out of love toward God, to totally adopt His will.

All of our misery in this life comes from the fact that we do not implement the will of Him Who sent us into this world. And we do not implement His will because we do not have love toward Him. For, whoever loves someone, he does so according to his will. The Lord Himself said, **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (St. John 14:15)**. By what could the Lord be able to proclaim His love toward the Father, if not by fulfilling the will of the Father? And, by what means can we proclaim our love toward the Lord Jesus crucified for us on the Cross, if not by fulfilling His will?

Our will, O my brethren, is as deceitful as a shadow. Let us not follow it so that we do not perish. But let us follow the will of the Lover of Mankind, the Lord, Who alone knows what is best for us.

O Humble and Man-loving Lord, teach us to do Your will.

To You be glory and thanks always, Amen.

JANUARY - 30 -

1. THE THREE HIERARCHS: SAINT BASIL THE GREAT, SAINT GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN AND SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Each of these saints have their own feast day. St. Basil the Great, January 1; St. Gregory the Theologian, January 25; and St. John Chrysostom, January 27. This combined feast day, January 30, was instituted in the eleventh century during the reign of Emperor Alexius Comnenus. At one time a debate arose among the people concerning who of the three is the greatest? Some extolled Basil because of his purity and courage; others extolled Gregory for his unequaled depth and lofty mind in theology; still others extolled Chrysostom because of his eloquence and clarity in expounding the Faith. Thus some were called Basilians, others Gregorgians, and the third were called Johannites. This debate was settled by Divine Providence to the benefit of the Church and to an even greater glory of the three saints. Bishop John of Euchaita (June 14) had a vision in a dream: At first, all three of these saints appeared to him separately in great glory and indescribable beauty, and after that all three appeared together. They said to him, "As you see, we are one in God and there is nothing contradictory in us; neither is there a first or a second among us." The saints also advised Bishop John that he write a common service for them and to order a common feast day of celebration. Following this wonderful vision, the debate was settled in this manner: January 30 would be designated as the common feast of these three hierarchs. The Greeks consider this feast not only an ecclesiastical feast but their greatest national school holiday.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR HIPPOLYTUS, BISHOP OF ROME

Hippolytus suffered for the Faith during the reign of Claudius. When the virgin Chrysa was unmercifully tortured for Christ in Rome, St. Hippolytus interceded on her behalf before the torturers and denounced them. Because of that protest, Hippolytus also was brought to court, was condemned and, after prolonged tortures, was sentenced to death. They bound his hands and feet and drowned him in the sea. Along with Hippolytus and Chrysa, twenty other martyrs also suffered. St. Hippolytus suffered in the year 269 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR THEOPHILUS THE NEW

As a commander of the Emperor Constantine and Empress Irene, Theophilus was enslaved by the Hagarites and was kept in prison for four years. When he refused all pressures of the Muslims to abandon the Christian Faith, Theophilus was beheaded in the year 784 A.D. and took up habitation with the Lord.

4. SAINT PETER, TSAR OF BULGARIA

Peter was the son of Simeon who was a great admirer of St. John of Rila. He gained independence for the Bulgarian Church from Constantinople and preserved Orthodoxy in Bulgaria from the Bogomils. After an unsuccessful war with the Hungarians and Russians, Peter died in 967 A.D. in the fifty-sixth year of his life.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE THREE HIERARCHS: SAINT BASIL, SAINT GREGORY, AND SAINT CHRYSOSTOM

Fasting and Faith - Basil,
Theology - Gregory,
Acts of Charity - Chrysostom,
Golden mouths, mouths of honey!
All laborers of one work;
Three separately - three angels,
The three together as God is one,
No one is the main one, no one is secondary.
In eternity, they all agree,
You invoke one, all three help,
You hymn one, all three hear,
You glorify one, all three rejoice.
Three men, one whole;
Three hierarchs, one deed;
Three names, one glory;
To all three of them, Christ is the Head.

REFLECTION

Here is an example of how emperors seek counsel from the saints and how the saints avoid vanity and riches and how they counsel emperors. The Orthodox Bulgarian Tsar Peter set off with his retinue toward the Rila mountain driven by the insatiable desire to see St. John of Rila and to benefit from his instruction. The tsar sent men ahead to inform the saint of his arrival, but the saint did not agree to meet with the tsar. The saddened tsar again sent some men with foodstuffs and an ample amount of gold as well as a petition requesting the saint to write some counsel for him. John, accepted the edible things but returned the gold, not even wanting to touch it, replied to the tsar: "If you desire the heavenly kingdom, be merciful as the heavenly Father. Do not trust in injustice and do not be covetous; be meek, quiet and be accessible to everyone. Do not accept praises from your noblemen. Let your purple robe radiate with virtues. May the remembrance of death never depart from your soul. Humble yourself before the feet of Mother Church; bow your head before her prime-hierarchs so that the King of kings, seeing your sincerity, reward you with goodness such as never entered into the heart of man." Receiving that letter, the tsar kissed it, and after that read it frequently.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Friend of children:

1. As a Friend of the angels in heaven who, like children, are innocent, obedient and without passions;
2. As a Friend of little children on earth, who easily and simply believe in God;
3. As a Friend to the saints, who by labor and grace are purified from sin and become innocent as children.

HOMILY

-About how men must become like children in order to be sons of God-

"Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (St. Matthew 18:3).

Thus speaks the Lord and His word is holy and true. What kind of advantage do children have over adults? They have three advantages: **in faith, in obedience** and in **forgiveness**. The child asks the parent about everything and whatever the parent replies, the child believes its parent. The child is obedient to its parent and easily subordinates its will to the will of the parent. The child is forgiving even though he provokes easily, but the child forgives quickly. Our Lord requires these three from all men i.e., **Faith, Obedience** and **Forgiveness**. He seeks that men believe in Him unconditionally, as a child believes in its parent. To be unconditionally obedient to Him as a child is to its parent and to be forgiving in relation to one another, not to remember evil and not to render evil for evil.

Faith, Obedience and Forgiveness are the three main characteristics of a child's soul. In addition to that, comes purity and joy. A child is not greedy; a child is not lustful; and a child is not vain glorious. The child has an eye unspoiled by vices and a joy unspoiled by worries.

O brethren, who can make us over again into children? No one, except the one Christ. He can make us over into children and help us to be born again and, that by His example, by His teaching and by the power of His Holy Spirit.

O Lord Jesus, perfect in obedience and meekness, Eternal Child of the Heavenly Father help us to become as infants by faith in You, by obedience toward You and by forgiveness one toward the other.

To You be glory and thanks always, Amen.

JANUARY - 31 -

1. CYRUS AND JOHN, THE UNMERCENARY SAINTS AND MIRACLE-WORKERS

These charitable and glorious saints were not blood brothers but were brothers in the spirit. At first, Cyrus lived in Alexandria, and as a physician he healed people by the power of Christ and by his knowledge of medicine. Learning that sickness mostly befalls man because of sin, Cyrus always directed the sick to purify their souls from sin through repentance and prayer and, thereby restore health to the body. When Diocletion's persecution against Christians began, Cyrus withdrew to Arabia where he received the monastic tonsure. He became as famous in Arabia as he was in Alexandria, so that people there also resorted to him for assistance. Hearing about Cyrus, John, then a Roman officer in Edessa, came to Arabia to see him. Upon meeting, they loved one another as a brother loves a brother and remained together to live a life of asceticism. At that time, a certain Christian woman named Anastasia, together with her three daughters, was tortured by the persecutors in the town of Canopus. Hearing of this, Cyrus and John came to Canopus to encourage the mother and her daughters not to abandon the Faith. And truly, thanks to the counsel of these saints, Anastasia endured all tortures and, with her daughters, was martyred for Christ. The daughters of Anastasia were named: **St. Theoctista, age 15; St. Theodota, age 13; and St. Eudocia, age 11.** The tormentors then captured Cyrus and John, who, after imprisonment and torture were beheaded in the year 311 A.D. Numerous miracles were wrought by these martyrs, both during their lives and after their deaths. Their relics were translated to Rome during the reign of Emperor Arcadius. These saints are invoked for assistance during the Blessing of Water, in the Sacrament of Holy Unction and especially by those suffering from insomnia.

2. THE FEMALE MARTYR TRYPHAENA

Tryphaena willingly and courageously endured many tortures for Christ. Because she did not want to deny her Faith, a wild ox was released which gored her to death. This occurred in the first century. St. Tryphaena is invoked by mothers who are unable to breast-feed their children.

3. THE VENERABLE NICETAS OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

As a monk Nicetas was disobedient to his superior, left the monastery and closed himself in a cell. Because of his disobedience, God permitted great temptations to befall him. Once, when Nicetas was at prayer, the devil appeared to him under the guise of a radiant angel and said to him: "Do not pray anymore; rather read books and I will pray for you!" Nicetas obeyed and ceased to pray and began to read books. He only read the Old Testament. He was unable even to open the Book of the New Testament, for the power of the devil prevented him from doing so. With the help of the devil, Nicetas prophesied only crimes, thefts, arson and other evil deeds which are known to the devil and in which he [the devil] participates. Finally, the holy fathers of the Caves realized that Nicetas had succumbed to the temptation of the devil, and they began to pray to God for him. Nicetas returned to the monastery, realized the destruction which plagued him, and directed himself on the right path. After prolonged repentance and many tears, God forgave him and bestowed upon him the gift of miracle-working. He died in the year 1108 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT NICETAS OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Nicetas, to the Creator, prayed,
That the Creator make him worthy,
That he, the Creator, may be able to see.
"Appear to me, O God, O God!"
O Nicetas, sin is pursuing you,
That this, from God, you implore!
Make yourself worthy and you will see
The All-eternal One in eternity.
The Immortal God does not allow
That mortal eye upon Him gaze;
Even to the celestial world, it is frightful
To gaze at the Almighty.
To us is given this life,
That, by it, to prepare ourselves,
That worthy, only after death
To gaze upon the eternal light.
But, Nicetas asks and prays,
That the Creator make him worthy,
That he, the Creator, may be able to see:
"Appear to me, O God Most High."
Then, to him the devil appeared:
"Bow down before me!" said he,
And Nicetas, the faster, the better,
Before him, on his knees he knelt!
For he thought it was an angel:
It was the devil all in glow,
With the glow of falsehood,
Filled Niceta's entire cell.
O, my brother, God, do not tempt;
This age is the age of preparation;
In this age is faith;
In that age however, is vision;
First the battle, then the victory;
First the pain, then satisfaction;
All occurs in its own time.

REFLECTION

Although the Holy Fathers praised monasticism as the angelic state, and although many of the greatest saints lived their lives and attained perfection in the deaf and lifeless desert, nevertheless, the Orthodox Church does not recommend tonsuring to all the faithful. "Neither all those in the desert were saved nor all those in the world were lost," said one saint. To a city dweller who, with no inclination for monasticism, desired to enter the monastery, St. Niphon said: "My child, a place neither saves nor destroys a man, but deeds save or destroy. For him who does not fulfill all the commandments of the Lord, there is no benefit from a sacred place or from a sacred rank. **King Saul** lived in the midst of royal luxury and he perished. **King David** lived in the same kind of luxury and he received a wreath. **Lot** lived among the lawless Sodomites and he was saved. **Judas** was numbered among the apostles and he went to Hades. Whoever says that it is impossible to be saved with a wife and children deceives himself. **Abraham** had a wife and children, three-hundred-eighteen servants and handmaidens, much gold and silver but, nevertheless, he was called the Friend of God. Oh, how many servants of the Church and lovers of the desert have been saved! How many aristocrats and soldiers! How many artesian and field-workers! Be pious and be a lover of men and you will be saved!"

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as Host in His house:

1. How He walks about this world as One Who has authority: commanding nature and expelling demons;
2. How He diligently labors over each man with whom He encounters as a Host over the members of His household;
3. How He acts in the Temple as a Host in His house cleansing the Temple of the money-changers.

HOMILY

-Against mediocrity and about fulfilling all the laws of God-

"These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (St. Luke 11:42).

The law and mercy are referred to in this text. In the souls of the Pharisees and sectarians, the law and mercy do not stand together, i.e., they are unable to fulfill the regulations of the law and to show mercy, but they argue about which is more important of these two; one, they omit and the other they adhere to. The Pharisees literally observed the letter of the Law, but they completely abandoned mercy and love for men. Sectarians flatter themselves that they adhere to God's justice but totally reject the prescriptions of Church Laws.

Orthodoxy represents the fullness of the Faith. The Church commands that we do this and not omit that. The Church is careful toward external prescriptions of the Faith, like a man when he walks among clay vessels and is careful not to break them. The Church is even more careful about the justice and mercy of God as a man who, walking among the clay vessels, values them and protects them, not because of the earth from which the vessels are made, but because of their priceless contents which are contained in them. Empty vessels that are never filled with any drink, are as worthless as is the empty legal formalisms of the Pharisees. A drink, however, when it is poured into the wind is spilled and wasted because it is not poured into the vessels designated for it.

And, so, in Orthodoxy, there is no one-sidedness as there was not in the Lord Jesus. The Lord speaks to John the Baptist, who breathes with the justice and mercy of God, that it is necessary to fulfill the Law; but to the Pharisees, empty paragraphists without the justice and mercy of God, He says, **"For it is mercy that I desire, not sacrifice!" (Hosea 6:6)**. It is evident that it is more important to do that which is necessary to do than that which must not be left undone. But it does not mean that, that which is less important is unnecessary. In the human organism, there are many important organs and many lesser important organs, but together they constitute the body of man.

O Lord, all encompassing, do not allow us to become one-sided, but assist us to fulfill Your entire will.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY - 1 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR TRYPHON

Tryphon was born of poor parents in the village of Lampsacus in Phrygia. In his childhood he tended geese. Also from his childhood he was able to cure illnesses that afflicted people and livestock and was able to expel evil spirits. The Roman Empire at that time was ruled by Emperor Gordian whose daughter Gordiana went insane and this caused her father great sorrow. All the physicians were unable to help Gordiana. The evil spirit spoke through Gordiana and said that no one can cast him out except Tryphon. After many who were named Tryphon in the empire were summoned, by Divine Providence, young Tryphon was also summoned. He was brought to Rome and he healed the emperor's daughter. The emperor lavished upon him many gifts all of which Tryphon, upon his return, distributed to the poor. In his village this holy youngster continued to tend geese and to pray to God. When Decius, the Christ-persecutor, was crowned emperor, Saint Tryphon was tortured and cruelly tormented for Christ. He endured all tortures with great joy saying: "Oh! If only I could be made worthy to die by fire and pain for the Name of the Lord and God, Jesus Christ!" All sufferings did him no harm and finally the tormentors sentenced him to be beheaded. Before his death Tryphon prayed to God and gave up his soul to his Creator in the year 250 A.D.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYRS PERPETUA AND FELICITAS; THE HOLY MARTYR SATYRUS AND OTHERS WITH THEM

As Christians, they were all cast into prison during the reign of Emperor Septimus Severus. Saint Perpetua, who was of noble birth, encouraged all the other prisoners not to be afraid to suffer for Christ. In a dream, Perpetua saw a ladder imbedded with sharp knives, swords, spears, fishhooks, nails and other death-bearing instruments extending from heaven to earth. At the bottom of the ladder there lay a loathsome serpent. She saw how Satyrus ran up to the top of the ladder first, unharmed, and from the top cried out to Perpetua: "Perpetua, I am waiting for you; come, but be careful of the serpent!" Encouraged by this, Perpetua stood on the head of the serpent as on the first rung of the ladder and, step by step, quickly raced to the top. When she reached the top, Perpetua entered into heaven and saw the most beautiful mansions of heaven and was very ecstatic. When she related her dream, all the prisoners interpreted that imminent death soon faced them, the first of them being Satyrus, which shortly came true. Satyrus was slain first, then Perpetua and all others one by one. As lambs slain for Christ the Lamb of God, they received from Christ, the eternal reward in the kingdom of Light. They all suffered for Christ between the years 202-203 A.D.

3. VENERABLE PETER OF GALATERA

At age seven Peter left the home of his parents for the sake of Christ and retreated into the wilderness. Here, by fasting and prayer, Peter attained such a state of perfection that he worked many miracles by the Spirit of God. In his ninety-ninth year, he took up habitation in the eternal Kingdom of Christ about the year 429 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

CHRIST - THE GOLDEN TREE

A golden-branched tree grew
With three golden branches,
On it, there are white birds,
White; as white as snow.
And the birds fell
Down deep,
The glowing golden tree remained,
The tall tree.
In the depths, death and darkness,
Dark and becoming darker,
Malice and hunger; sorrow and grief,
Insanity, delirium.
The birds in the blackness of pitch all were immersed;
Never again able
To soar to the heights.
The golden tree took pity on the unfortunate birds,
And a secret conversation began among the branches.
Then one branch bent over to the terrible abyss,
And raised the nest of the birds to the top of the mountain.
Thus, Christ the golden-branch bent toward the earth
And raised fallen man to the glory of the Trinity.
And now, the golden tree grows with three golden branches,
On it are white birds; white, white as snow.

REFLECTION

The Prayer of Saint Tryphon before his death: "O Lord, God of gods and King of kings, the most holy of all holies, I thank You that You made me worthy to complete my mortification without faltering. And now, I pray to You that the hand of the invisible demon does not touch me; that the demon not drag me into the abyss of destruction. Rather, let Your holy angels lead me into Your beautiful dwelling place and make me an heir of Your desired kingdom. Receive my soul and harken to the prayer of all those who would offer sacrifices to You in my remembrance. Gaze upon them from Your holy dwelling place and grant them abundant and incorruptible gifts. For You are the only good and merciful Gift-giver unto the ages of ages. Amen." Since Tryphon suffered in Nicaea and since many miracles occurred over his lifeless body, the citizens of Nicaea wanted to bury Tryphon in their cemetery. But, the saint appeared in a vision and expressed his desire that he be translated to his village of Lampsacus where he once tended geese and to be buried there.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the fresh and healthy air of the soul:

1. As the fresh and healthy air by which the soul breathes and is saved from corruption;
2. As the fresh and healthy air which the prophets, apostles and saints inhaled and were healthy in soul;
3. As the fresh and healthy air of my soul which drives out the stench of sin in me and makes me fresh and healthy in soul.

HOMILY

-About the Word of God which purifies as a fire-

" You are already clean through the word which I have spoken to you" (St. John 15:3).

By His word the Lord created the world; by His word He renewed the world; by His word He forgave sins; by His word He healed diseases; by His word He drove out evil spirits; by His word He calmed the storms and the winds. By His holy word He cleanses men, even now, that they, cleansed, may bring forth abundant fruit. As are the vines, when they are pruned and cleansed, the word of the Lord is powerful for it comes forth from the All-powerful. **"By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made" (Psalm 33:6).** The word of the Lord is as bright as the sun but, when necessary, it is as fiery as the sun and then burns out everything that goes against the Lord. The word of the Lord is as sweet as honey; but, when necessary, it is as bitter as medicine. The word of the Lord is as welcome as a friend who knocks at the door when he is most needed; but, when necessary, the word of the Lord is as a judge who finds us in sin and who judges us without allowing us any excuse. The word of the Lord is true, just, wise and merciful which is why it is so All-powerful. No one and nothing, either in heaven or on earth, is able to go against it. The human word is also powerful when it is true, just, wise and merciful. But just as illness is able to exhaust and so weaken a giant that he becomes more powerless than a child; so falsehoods, injustice, insanity and lack of mercy so weakens the word of a human that it becomes nothing; a chattering fox against the moon. He who spares words forges them of pure silver. And whoever unmercifully squanders them must mix earth with silver.

Your word, O Lord, is life and truth. Cleanse us by Your All-powerful word as You cleansed Your apostles to bear much fruit and to be made worthy of Your kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 2 -

1. THE MEETING [PRESENTATION] OF OUR LORD IN THE TEMPLE

The fortieth day after His birth, the All-Holy Virgin brought her Divine Son into the Temple of Jerusalem, in accordance with the Law, to dedicate Him to God and to purify herself. **"Consecrate to me every first-born that opens the womb among the Israelites both of man and beast, for it belongs to me" (Exodus 13:2).** **"Tell the Israelites: when a woman has conceived and gives birth to a boy, she shall be unclean for seven days, with the same uncleanness as at her menstrual period. On the eighth day, the flesh of the boy's foreskin shall be circumcised, and then she shall spend thirty-three days more in becoming purified of her blood; she shall not touch anything sacred nor enter the sanctuary till the days of her purification are fulfilled. If she gives birth to a girl, for fourteen days she shall be as unclean as at her menstruation, after which she shall spend sixty-six days in becoming purified of her blood. When the days of her purification for a son or for a daughter are fulfilled, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the meeting tent a yearling lamb for a holocaust and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. The priest shall offer them up before the Lord to make atonement for her, and thus she will be clean again after her flow of blood. Such is the law for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl child" (Leviticus 12:2-7).** Even though neither the one nor the other was necessary, nevertheless the Lawgiver did not, in anyway, want to transgress His own Law whom He had given through Moses, His servant and prophet. At that time, the high-priest Zaccharias, the father of John the Forerunner [Precursor], was on duty in the Temple["serving as a priest before God in the order of his division" **St. Luke 1:8**]. Zaccharias placed the Virgin, not in the temple area reserved for women but rather in the area reserved for virgins. On this occasion, two unusual persons appeared in the Temple: the Elder Simeon and Anna, the daughter of Phanuel. The righteous Simeon took the Messiah in his arms and said: **"Now, Master, You may let Your servant go in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation" (St. Luke 2: 29-30).** Simeon also spoke the following words about the Christ-child: **"Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel" (St. Luke 2:34).** Then Anna, who from her youth served God in the Temple by fasting and prayers, recognized the Messiah and glorified God and proclaimed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem about the coming of the long-awaited One. The Pharisees present in the Temple, who having seen and heard all, became angry with Zacharias because he placed the Virgin Mary in the area reserved for virgins and reported this to King Herod. Convinced that this is the new king about whom the Magi from the east spoke, Herod immediately sent his soldiers to kill Jesus. In the meantime the Holy Family had already left the city and set out for Egypt under the guidance of an angel of God. **The Feast of the Meeting of our Lord in the Temple** was celebrated from earliest times but the solemn celebration of this day was established in the year 544 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Justinian.

2. THE HOLY NEO-MARTYR JORDAN

Jordan, born in Trebizond, was a coppersmith by trade. Because he openly defended his faith in Christ and unmasked the faith of Islam, Jordan suffered at the hands of the Turks in 1650 A.D. at Galata in Constantinople. The monk Gabriel, a Canonarch of the Great Church in Constantinople [St. Sophia], suffered in the same manner in the year 1672 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SIMEON, THE GOD-RECEIVER

When winter encounters spring,
The aged Simeon was of good fortune:
He encountered the long-awaited One,
Who, by the prophets, was foretold,
Him, the mine of all heavenly riches -
As naked, he [Simeon] the young child saw,
And in this manner, Simeon prophesied:
The evening has descended upon my life;
This One, lay down to conquer many
Or to raise many. Thus the spirit speaks -
The Prophecy of old was fulfilled:
Jesus became the measure and the standard,
The source of happiness, peace and joy,
But also the target of disputes and maliciousness.
One He uplifts, the other He overturns
And Paradise and Hades He opens to men.
Let everyone choose whatever their hearts speak,
In Paradise with Christ! Our heart desires.

REFLECTION

Speaking about the spread and celebration of Christmas, St. John Chrysostom says: " Magnificent and noble trees when planted in the ground shortly attain great heights and become heavily laden with fruit; so it is with this day." So it is with the day of the Meeting of our Lord in the Temple. In the beginning this day was discussed among Christians but the solemn celebration began from the period of the great Emperor Justinian. During the reign of this emperor, a great pestilence afflicted the people in Constantinople and vicinity so that about five-thousand or more people died daily. At the same time a terrible earthquake occurred in Antioch. Seeing the weakness of man's ability to prevent these misfortunes the emperor, in consultation with the patriarch, ordered a period of fast and prayer throughout the entire empire. And, on the day of the Meeting [The Presentation] itself, arranged great processions throughout the towns and villages that the Lord might show compassion on His people. And truly, the Lord did show compassion; for the epidemic and earthquake ceased at once. This occurred in the year 544 A.D. Following this and from that time on, the Feast of the Presentation [Meeting] began to be celebrated as a major feast of the Lord. The tree, in time, grew and began to bring forth-abundant fruit.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as Health:

1. As Health of our mind; for with Him we think healthily;
2. As Health of our heart; for with Him we feel healthy;
3. As the Health of our will; for with Him we act healthily;
4. As the Health of family, the Church, the school, the people and every institution.

HOMILY

-About the guidance of the Spirit of God-

"Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in to the desert" (St. Luke 4:1).

You see, brethren, what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Without the Spirit of God, man is filled with worries: where he will go and how he will go. But with the Spirit of God man is without those worries. For then the Spirit instructs man where he will walk and how he will act and man becomes sinless in his movement and in his actions because the Holy Spirit is sinless Who leads and guides him. Man cannot walk justly nor act righteously if the All-omnipotent and All-omniscient Spirit of God does not inform him. Whoever is not led by the Holy Spirit of God is led, either by his own individual spirit or by the evil spirit of the demon. As a result of this he becomes helpless, bitter, remorseful, angry and despondent. We cannot endure the Spirit of God in the fullness as Christ the Lord, but we can receive the Spirit of God as much as needed in order to know where, what and how. According to the purity of the heart, the Holy Spirit settles in the heart and from the heart directs man.

That is why the Church often repeats this prayer to the Holy Spirit: **"O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth! Come and abide in us."** O God, the Holy Spirit,

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 3 -

1. SAINT SIMEON, THE GOD-RECEIVER

During the reign of the Egyptian Emperor Ptolemy Philadelphus, Simeon was chosen as one of the prominent Seventy to whom was entrusted the task of translating the Bible from the Hebrew language into the Greek language [The Septuagint]. Simeon was performing his task conscientiously but when he was translating the book of the Prophet Isaiah and came upon the prophecy: "**Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and will give birth to a son**" (Isaiah 7:14), he became confused and took a knife to remove the word "**virgin**" and to replace it with the words, "**young woman**," and as such to translate it into Greek. At that moment, however, an angel of God appeared to Simeon and restrained him from his intention, explaining to him that the prophecy is true; that the prophecy is correctly written: that it is true and correct. The messenger of God also said that Simeon would be convinced of it personally for, according to the Will of God, he will not die until he sees the Messiah born of the Virgin. The righteous Simeon rejoiced to hear such a voice from heaven, left the prophecy unchanged and thanked God Who is making him worthy to live and to see the Promised One. When the young Child Jesus was presented in the Temple in Jerusalem by the Virgin Mary, the Spirit of God appeared to Simeon who was very old and as "white as a swan." Simeon quickly entered the Temple and there recognized both the Virgin and the young Child by the light that shone around their heads as an aureal. The joyful Simeon took Christ into his hands and prayed to God to release him from this life: "**Now, Master, You may let Your servant go in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation**" (St. Luke 2: 29-30). Anna the Prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, was also there, who recognized the Messiah and proclaimed Him to the people.

"**And coming forward at that very moment, she gave thanks to God, and spoke about the Child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem**" (St. Luke 2:38). At that time, Anna was eighty-four years old. St. Simeon died shortly after that. This righteous Elder Simeon is considered to be the Protector of young children.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ADRIAN AND EUBULUS

These two holy souls arrived from their place of Baneas in Caesarea of Cappadocia to attend the imprisoned Christians in the dungeon and to console and encourage them. However they, too, were arrested and sentenced to death. Adrian was beheaded and Eubulus was thrown before wild beasts in the year 309 A.D. Thus, not grieving over this life, they honorably and joyfully entered into life eternal.

HYMN OF PRAISE

A PRAYER FOR A SMALL CHILD

O Powerful Lord, have mercy and save,
Do not extinguish this small flame with death!
This child is like the small flame of a candle,
And the winds of the world are terrible, even to the stars;
A weak fire is banked beneath the ashes
And beneath Your hand, the soul of man.
When the water rises and reaches the throat,
And the flame becomes smaller and the fire becomes damp,
O Lord, save, have mercy and alleviate!
Thus, David the Prophet, prayed to You
Even though he was a huge torch.
And a weak child at the base of heaven
And from sinful thoughts his head began to ache.
Every wind of malice weakened him.
It would be extinguished quickly from the tumultuous winds,
If you do not save, O Helper, hurry,
O Lord, have mercy and save us even now,
And this small flame do not extinguish with death!
Through the prayers, O God, of Your favorite Elder,
Holy Saint Simeon, the wonderful receiver of God.

REFLECTION

How great a glory in heaven befitted St. Simeon the Receiver of God, who held the Savior of the world in his hands, which the following incident clearly shows as, related in the hagiography of St. Peter the Athonite (June 12). As a commander during a battle, Peter was enslaved, chained and cast into prison in the town of Samara on the shores of the Euphrates River. Languishing in prison for along time Peter, in tears, prayed to St. Nicholas to beseech God on his behalf to liberate him from prison, promising that he will completely dedicate himself to God. St. Nicholas appeared to him in a dream and told him that although he [St. Nicholas] prays to God on his behalf, God delays his deliverance because he [Peter] earlier made a similar vow to God and did not keep it. And further, St. Nicholas counseled Peter that he ought to pray to St. Simeon the God-receiver "who is very mighty before God and stands close to the Throne of God together with the All-Holy Virgin and St. John the Forerunner." Peter heeded the counsel of St. Nicholas and proceeded to pray to St. Simeon. Again St. Nicholas appeared to him, together with St. Simeon, not in a dream but in reality. Peter saw Simeon glorious in appearance, face glowing, and attired in the vestments of an Old Testament priest with a golden staff in his hand. St. Simeon said to Peter: "Do you want to fulfill the vow and become a monk?" To that, Peter replied: "Yes master, with God's help." Simeon then touched Peter's chains with his staff and the chains melted like wax. Opening the doors of the dungeon, the saint led Peter from prison.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Cornerstone:

1. As the Cornerstone in building personal character;
2. As the Cornerstone in building the family and a nation;
3. As the Cornerstone of every good intentioned social transformation and inspiration of mankind.

HOMILY

-About the Spirit of God Who speaks through the Spirit-bearers-

**"Do not worry about how you are to speak --- but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you"
(St. Matthew 10: 19-20).**

These are the words of Him Who knows all and Who declared to the world knowledge which no one knew before His visit to mankind. If someone is filled with the Spirit of God, he does not speak from the spirit of man but the Spirit of God speaks from him and through him. He is only an instrument or a lyre of God's Spirit through which God the Spirit speaks.

When that kind of man speaks, he speaks infallibly and no one can find falsehood in his speech except those, who because of the perversion of their minds, consider truth as falsehood. How men speak, filled with the Spirit of God, was clearly shown by the example of the prophets and more clearly shown by the example of the apostles. Miraculous and unbelievable did the words of the apostles seem to strangers, i.e., those who did not have the Spirit of God in themselves and who knew how to speak only of the earth, considered the apostles as intoxicated. In reality, to the ignorant, all those people who first began to speak about the hidden miracles of this physical world, about the power of steam, about magnetism, about electricity, about wireless telegraphy, and conversation at a distance [the telephone] appeared intoxicated and foolish.

How then do spiritual men not seem intoxicated and foolish who, led by the Spirit of God, speak about countless hidden mysteries of the spiritual kingdom? Whoever humbles himself before God, God makes him powerful. The Spirit of God settles in a contrite heart and from there speaks through the mouth of man. This is confirmed not only on the prophets and apostles but also on the countless number of God's sons and daughters.

O Good Lord, do not refuse us Your Holy Spirit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 4 -

1. THE VENERABLE ISIDORE OF PELUSIUM

Isidore was an Egyptian by birth and the son of a prominent family and kinsman of the Alexandrian Patriarchs Theophilus and Cyril. Having studied all the secular disciplines, he renounced worldly riches and glories and devoted himself completely to the spiritual life for the love of Christ. He was a great and ardent defender and interpreter of the Orthodox Faith. According to the statements of Nicephorus the historian, St. Isidore wrote more than ten-thousand letters to various individuals in which he reproached some, counseled some, and comforted and instructed others. In one letter St. Isidore writes: "It is more important to teach by a life of doing good than to preach in eloquent terms." In another, he says: "If one desires that his virtues appear great, let him consider them small and they will surely manifest themselves as great." The first and basic rule for St. Isidore was this: "First do, then teach according to the example of our Lord Jesus." At the time of the persecution of St. John Chrysostom when the entire population was divided into two camps; one for and one against, St. Isidore, this great pillar of Orthodoxy, sided with St. John Chrysostom. He wrote to Patriarch Theophilus saying what a great light of the Church Chrysostom is and begged him to avoid hatefulness toward him. Isidore lived long and accomplished much, glorifying Christ the God with his life and his writings. Isidore took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ about the year 436 A.D.

2. VENERABLE NICHOLAS, THE CONFESSOR

This saint was from the Island of Crete. He arrived in Constantinople to visit his kinsman, Theodore; the abbot of the Studite Monastery and here he remained and was tonsured a monk. As a monk, Nicholas underwent all mortifications for the sake of the salvation of his soul. During the persecution of the Church by Leo the Armenian, Theodore and Nicholas were cruelly tortured, humiliated and beaten with oxen straps and finally thrown into a dungeon where they were imprisoned for three years. After the death of St. Theodore, Nicholas became abbot of the Studite Monastery. Even during his lifetime, he worked many miracles through the power and grace of God. Nicholas healed Eudocia, the wife of Emperor Basil, as well as Helen, the wife of Manuel, the patrician. To Theophilus Melisenus, a prominent nobleman whose other children did not survive birth, Nicholas blessed the newly born daughter and prophesied that she will live and that she will be very fruitful which occurred, to the joy of the parents. On the very day of his death, Nicholas gathered the monastic brotherhood and asked them what they lacked? "Wheat," answered the monks. Then the dying man said: "He Who fed Israel in the wilderness will send you an ample supply of wheat within three days." And indeed, the third day, a boatload of wheat sent by Emperor Basil sailed below the monastery. Nicholas took up habitation in the heavenly kingdom on February 4, 868 A.D., in the seventy-fifth year of his life.

3. THE HOLY NEO-MARTYR JOSEPH

Joseph was born in Aleppo. He was pressured by the Turks to embrace Islam. Joseph not only rejected this but also began to expose the falsehoods of Islam and to praise the Faith of Christ. For that, Joseph was tortured and beheaded in the year 1686 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SACRIFICE OF GRATITUDE

Render sacrifice to God; a sacrifice of gratitude,
O you wealthy ones; according to God's mercy!
Who is wealthy and with what; with that let him barter,
Everyone with his gift; let him, the Kingdom acquire.
Whoever is wealthy with money; let him money, offer,
Whoever is rich with wheat; wheat let him distribute,
To whom wisdom is given; others, let him teach,
To him whose hands are strong; let him perform service.
Whoever knows a trade; let him honorably uphold it,
Let him conscientiously consider himself as a debtor of God.
Let him, who knows how to sing; praise God,
Only he is small, who does not know God.
Whoever received what; with that let him serve,
With mercy toward men; let him repay God,
Not all are the same, nor do all possess the same,
But a pure heart, everyone could give to God.
O pureness of heart, a sacrifice most miraculous,
For salvation, you are the crucial virtue,
And on your sacrificial altar, your incense ascends,
Arrives before the Lord, faster than anything.

REFLECTION

Impose upon yourself some form of penance [Epitimija] for the sins of others. If you have judged someone or punished someone, impose upon yourself a form of penance. You should also suffer voluntarily for the sins of sinners. This is pleasing to God. This mystery was known by the saints who condemned themselves for the sins of others. Even non-Christian peoples perceived this mystery. There exists this custom in China: when an executioner beheads a criminal who is sentenced to death, he then approaches the judge and informs him that the verdict was carried out. The judge then reimburses him with a silver coin because he killed the criminal and orders that the executioner be whipped forty lashes because he killed a man. Christian saints profoundly understood the mystery of sin and human injustice. For the saints, all human sin has as long a history, as there is distance from us to Adam.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as Joy:

1. As Joy which refreshes the whole spirit of man;
2. As Joy which enlivens and strengthens in man all power toward good;
3. Joy from His Name, Joy from His Words, Joy from His Works and Joy from His Spirit.

HOMILY

-About the providence of Zacchaeus of little stature-

"Today, salvation has come to this house" (St. Luke 19:9).

Thus it was spoken by the One Whose word is life and joy and restoration of the righteous. Just as the bleak forest clothes itself into greenery and flowers from the breath of spring, so does every man, regardless of how arid and darkened by sin, becomes fresh and youthful from the nearness of Christ. For the nearness of Christ is as the nearness of some life-giving and fragrant balsam which restores health, increases life, give fragrance to the soul, to the thoughts and to the words of man. In other words, distance from Christ means decay and death and His nearness means salvation and life.

"Today, salvation has come to this house" said the Lord upon entering the house of Zacchaeus the sinner. Christ was the salvation that came and Zacchaeus was the house into which He entered. Brethren, each one of us is a house in which sin dwells as long as Christ is distant and to which salvation comes when Christ approaches it. Nevertheless, will Christ approach my house and your house? That depends on us. Behold, He did not arbitrarily enter the house of the sinner Zacchaeus, rather He entered as a most desired guest. Zacchaeus of little stature climbed into a tree in order to see the Lord Jesus with his own eyes. Zacchaeus, therefore, sought him; Zacchaeus desired Him. We must also seek Him in order to find Him and desire Him in order that He would draw nearer to us and, with our spirit, to climb high in order to encounter His glance. Then He will visit our house as He visited the house of Zacchaeus and with Him salvation will come.

Draw near to us O Lord, draw near and bring to us Your eternal salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR AGATHA

Agatha, this glorious virgin and martyr for Christ, was born in the Sicilian town of Palermo of noble and wealthy parents. When Emperor Decius began a persecution against Christians, St. Agatha was arrested and brought to trial before Judge Quintian. The judge, seeing Agatha beautiful in countenance, desired to have her for his wife. When he suggested this, Agatha answered that she is the bride of Christ and cannot be unfaithful to her Betrothed. Quintian subjected her to cruel tortures. Agatha was ridiculed, whipped, bound to a tree and flogged until blood flowed. After that, the judge again tried to persuade her to deny Christ and to avoid any further torture and suffering. To that the bride of Christ replied: "These tortures are very beneficial for me; just as wheat cannot arrive at the granary before it is cleansed from the chaff, so my soul cannot enter into Paradise if my body, beforehand, is not humbled by tortures." Then, the torturer ordered that her breasts be cut off and that she be cast into prison. St. Peter appeared to Agatha in prison and restored her to health and wholeness of body. Again, Agatha was led out for torture and again, cast into prison where she gave up her soul to God in the year 251 A.D. in the town of Catania during the reign of Emperor Decius. After her death, the torturer Quintian departed for Palermo to usurp her estate. However, along the way, his horse and the horses of his soldiers became wild with rage. Quintian was bitten on the face, thrown to the ground and trampled to death. Swift was the punishment of God that reached out for this savage crime perpetrated against St. Agatha.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR THEODULA

Theodula suffered for Christ during the reign of the nefarious Roman Emperor Diocletian. During her torture, Theodula brought one of her torturers, Heladius, to his senses and converted him to the Faith of Christ. When Heladius openly confessed his faith in Christ, he was beheaded. Theodula held up very courageously at her trial at which time the judge referred to her as being "deranged." To that Theodula responded: "You, who have forgotten the One True God and bow down before lifeless stones, are deranged." The judge then subjected Theodula to cruel tortures, which she heroically endured and, by her heroism during this torturing, she astonished many and converted them to Christ. Among those were two distinguished citizens: Macarius and Evgarius. With these two and many others, Theodula was thrown into a fiery furnace where they all honorably died and were made worthy of the kingdom of Christ.

3. SAINT POLYEUCTUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Because of his great mind, religious zeal and eloquence, Polyeuctus was called "a second Chrysostom." During the time that Patriarch Polyeuctus governed the Church and Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus ruled the empire, the Russian Princess Olga traveled to Constantinople and was baptized in the year 957 A.D. The patriarch baptized her and the emperor was her godfather. Prophetically, St. Polyeuctus said to her: "Blessed are you among Russian women, for you have loved light and cast off darkness; the sons of Russia will bless you to the last generation." From among the simple monks, Polyeuctus was elevated as patriarch in the year 946 A.D., and remained on the patriarchal throne until his death in 970 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT AGATHA

Dark is the dungeon; radiant is the martyr,
In the darkness, Saint Agatha glows,
Over the courtyard of the dungeon, drenched with light,
There the tormentor lives, covered with shame,
Thinking up new tortures for the virgin Agatha,
Torments himself and contemplates, darkened in the midst of light,
Who is wedded to Christ, the dungeon is bright,
The palace, a place of despair, to the enemy of justice!

SAINT THEODULA

Dark is the dungeon; radiant is the martyr,
St. Theodula, as soon as she heard of Christ,
After Christ she followed, a pure dove.
Because of Christ, the mob pressed her into darkness,
But joyfully, Theodula stands,
Joyfully stands, not fearing anyone.
While her enemies, with malice filled,
Wretched despair in the midst of the enchanting palace,
Only of evil, think; only of malice, serve
Everything for them is empty and about everything, they complain,
For they do not possess God, for they know not Christ,
All the mysteries of life, erroneously they read!

REFLECTION

The monks ask of the great Abba Ischyryon: "What have we done?" "We have fulfilled the commandments of God," Ischyryon replied. "And, what will those do who come after us?" "They will be doing what we are doing, but only half as much." "And those after them?" "Before the end of time, they will not keep the monastic practice [rule] but such misfortunes and temptations will befall them that, through their patience during those assaults and temptations, they will prove themselves greater than us and our fathers in the kingdom of God."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the only true Enlightener:

1. As the Enlightener of every individual man;
2. As the Enlightener, consequently, of both society and the entire human race;
3. As the Enlightener Who enlightens the mind, the heart and the will of man with eternal light.

HOMILY

-About death as sleeping-

"Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him" (St. John 11:11).

The Lord of life calls death "sleeping." O what an inexpressible comfort that is for us! O what sweet news for the world! Physical death, therefore, does not mean the annihilation of man rather only sleeping from which only He can awaken; He Who awakened the first dust to life by His word.

When the Lord cried out: **"Lazarus!" (St. John 11:43)**, the man awoke and lived. The Lord knows the name of each of us. When Adam knew the names of every creature of God, why would not the Lord know each one of us by name? Not only does He know but He also calls us by name. O, the sweet and life-creating voice of the only Lover of mankind! This voice can create sons of God from stones. Why, then, can He not awaken us out of our sinful sleep?

It is told that a certain man raised a stone to kill his brother. But, at that moment, it seemed to him that he heard the voice of his mother calling him by name. He only heard the voice of his mother and his hand began to quiver. He dropped the stone and was ashamed of his evil intention. The voice of his mother awakened him from committing a deadly sin. If the voice of a mother saves and awakens from death, how much more, then, the voice of the Creator and Life-giver!

Whenever the Lord cried out to someone who was dead in the body [physically dead] all of them awoke and arose. But, everyone did not awaken and arise among those who were dead in the soul [spiritually dead] when the Lord cried out to them. But, for this awakening, for this resurrection, the agreement of the will of the deceased is necessary. Judas! Do you betray with a kiss? **"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (St. Luke 23:48)**. That is how the Life-creating Voice cried out, but the dead man [Judas] remained dead and the sinner did not awaken. **"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Act of the Apostles 9:4)**. The same Life-creating Voice cried out and he who was asleep in sin awakened and the dead man became alive. In truth, deeper is the sleep of sin than the sleep of death and the one who is asleep [in sin] does not easily awaken.

O Sweet Lord, awaken us from the sleep of sin; awaken O Lord!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 6 -

1. SAINT BUCOLUS, BISHOP OF SMYRNA

Bucolus was a disciple of St. John the Theologian, who consecrated him bishop of Smyrna. In Smyrna, there were few that were baptized. In the darkness of paganism, St. Bucolus shown as a bright candle. He distinguished himself with every virtue, especially meekness and humility. Before his death, Bucolus consecrated the glorious Polycarp as his successor to the espiscopacy. He died peacefully and took up habitation with the Lord.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR FAUSTA

Fausta was martyred for Christ during the reign of Emperor Maximian between 305 A.D. - 311 A.D. By her heroism, Fausta astonished her persecutors and succeeded to convert them to Christianity: the eighty-year old pagan priest Evilasis and Maximus, the Eparch. When the judge threatened Fausta with more severe tortures, she asked him to make her an icon with the depictions of all those tortures with which he threatened her. When the icon was completed, it was shown to her and St. Fausta said: "As this icon does not feel any pain, so my body does not feel any pain from your punishments, for my soul is secure in the Lord." The judge then threw her into a vat of boiling hot water where this thirteen-year-old girl died with prayer on her lips and her soul entered Paradise.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR DOROTHEA

Dorothea was a prominent and beautiful maiden from Caesarea in Cappadocia. Sapphirus, the administrator of the province, turned Dorothea over to the two pagan sisters Christina and Kallista in order to dissuade her from Christ. But, the opposite occurred; Dorothea succeeded to convert both sisters to the Faith of Christ. Enraged, Sapphirus ordered the two sisters bound back to back and threw them into a vat of pitch and set it on fire. He then sentenced Dorothea to death. She joyfully heard the sentence and cried out: "I give thanks to You, O Soul-loving Christ, that You are leading me into Your All-holy mansions!" Theophilus, a certain nobleman who was present, laughed at these words and cried out to Dorothea: "Listen, O bride of Christ, send me apples and flowers from the pomegranate tree from the Paradise of your Bridegroom." "Indeed, I will do that," replied the martyr. When Dorothea was at the place of execution, all at once a beautiful young man appeared with three beautiful apples and three red flowers from the pomegranate. That was an angel of God and it was winter. Dorothea asked the angel to bring them to Theophilus and to tell him: "Behold, this is what you desired!" When Theophilus received the message and saw the gift, he was thoroughly frightened. For him, everything turned upside down and he, a confirmed pagan, became a Christian. He was tortured and slain for Christ and his soul entered the Paradise of the Lord Jesus soon after St. Dorothea.

4. SAINT PHOTIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Photius was a great beacon of the Church. He was the emperor's relative and a grandson of the glorious Patriarch Tarasius. He was a vigorous protector of the Church from the authority-loving pope and other Roman distortions of the Faith. In six days he went through all the ranks from a layman to patriarch. He was consecrated patriarch on Christmas day, 857 A.D. and died in the Lord in the year 891 A.D.

5. THE VENERABLE BARSANUPHIUS AND THE VENERABLE JOHN

Both Barsanuphius and John were great ascetics, discerners and miracle-workers from Gaza. They left a famous work entitled the "Book of Answers" dealing with many questions about the spiritual life. They lived in the sixth century.

6. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYRS MARTHA AND MARY AND THEIR BROTHER LYCARION

All three were crucified for Christ and then pierced and slain with a lance.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS MARTHA AND MARY

SAINT LYCARION

Saints Martha and Mary, sisters by birth,
Lycarion their small brother, of little strength;
The aged mother; sweet soul, teaches them very well:
"Love Christ my children, for He suffered for us."
From out of there the commander comes; awesome and powerful,
Ill-tempered man; he slays those faithful to Christ.
Of their home, the sisters opened the door,
Of the ill-tempered man, they are not afraid at all.
"Harken O commander of the Emperor, we are Christians,
Like you, we are not; whom the demon sold to the devil."
On a cross, the ill-tempered commander raised them,
At that moment, the young Lycarion, drew near:
"And I, and I, a Christian am; crucify me also!"
The pains on the Cross are unbearable, the mother horrified,
From leg to leg, to her children, her kisses she imparts;
With a tormented voice from the Cross; the daughters' console her:
"For us, dearest mother, with sorrow, do not be broken up,
Love for Christ, you taught us,
For temporary pains, sweet pleasure will be in Paradise,
In the radiance of Paradise, we will await you mother.
Lycarion, your glorious son and your daughters two
O rejoice in such a fruit of your womb!"
As a fiery pillar, the mother's countenance lighted up:
"My dear children, blessed be you; O blessed be me!"

REFLECTION

St. Barsanuphius, who for fifty years lived secluded in a cell and did not allow himself to be seen by any living person, attained exceptionally purity and perceptiveness through his godly-thoughts and prayer. Here are a few thoughts from his "Book of Answers." "Every thought which is not preceded by the silence of humility does not proceed from God. All that is from the devil occurs with confusion and disturbance." "When you pray and God delays to fulfill your request, He does this for your benefit in order to teach you forbearance." "Visible thieves are servants of invisible thieves; imaginary thoughts." "The Lord Jesus Christ endured all things and finally ascended on the Cross, which means the deadening of the body and passion and a holy and perfect rest." "Our Lord wants you to honor every man more than yourself." When they asked the elder whether they should hire a defender [advocate] regarding a dispute between the monastery and certain men, the elder replied: "If you would purchase the defense of men, then God will not defend you."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Laborer:

1. As a physical Laborer throughout many long years;
2. As a spiritual Laborer who constantly taught man, comforted man and healed man giving the new law to the world;
3. As a tireless Laborer who left the commandment, **"I must work the works of Him Who sent Me while it is still day"** (St. John 9:4).

HOMILY

-About the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son-

"I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me"
(St. John 7:29).

No one has ever dared say that they know God. Many have only said that "they believe in God." Only our Lord Jesus Christ spoke the words: **"I know Him."** And immediately He explained from where He knows Him, saying: **"because I am from Him, and He sent Me."** The **first reason: "I am from Him"** testifies to the eternal being of the Son; and the **second reason: "And He sent Me,"** testifies to the manifestation of the Son in time in the physical world as an emissary of the Holy Trinity.

For us, who are Christ-believing, it is not given to know the Father as His Only-begotten Son knows Him but to us it is given and it is commanded that we believe. Our merit is in believing and not in knowing. If all of us knew God by seeing, no one would have any merit. For what kind of merit is there in seeing and recognizing? However, not to see and believe, in this is merit; in this is virtue; in this is our salvation. We are not worthy to see God and by seeing to know, for we are weakened by sin and alienated from God. But, the mercy of God gave us faith in this life which is able to bring us closer to God and to lead us into the eternal kingdom of seeing and knowing in that life. O, my brethren, let us believe in Christ the Lord for He knows. He does not speak by faith but by knowing.

O Merciful Lord, confirm the faith in us. Extend the hem of Your garment that we may hold on to it to the end of our lives.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 7 -

1. SAINT PARTHENIUS, BISHOP OF LAMPSACUS

Parthenius was the son of a deacon from the town of Melitopolis. As a child he remembered well the words of the Gospel and endeavored to fulfill them. He settled in the area of a lake where he fished. He then sold the fish and distributed the money to the poor. By God's Providence he was chosen as bishop of Lampsacus. He cleansed the town of paganism, closed the idolatrous temples, built many churches and strengthened the faithful in the Faith. Through prayer, he healed every manner of illness and he was particularly powerful over evil spirits. On one occasion when he wanted to cast out an evil spirit from an insane man, the evil spirit begged him not to do so. Parthenius said to him: "I will give you another man into whom you can enter and in him, you can dwell." The evil spirit asked him: "Who is this man?" "I am that man," replied the saint, "enter and dwell in me!" Upon hearing this, the evil spirit fled as though burned by fire crying out: "How can I enter into the house of God!" St. Parthenius lived a long time and through his work manifested an abundant love for God and man. Parthenius entered into the eternal rest of Christ in the fourth century.

2. THE VENERABLE LUKE OF HELLAS

Luke was born in Castoria. Even as a child, he never desired to taste meat and always conducted his life in chastity and in prayer. At one time, Luke entered a field to sow grains of wheat, but along the way he distributed a greater portion of the grains of wheat to the poor and the lesser portion which was left over, he planted. From that lesser amount of seeds of wheat, God gave him a greater harvest than had previously come from the entire amount. After that, Luke left his widowed mother and entered a monastery. The grieving mother prayed earnestly to God to reveal to her the secret where her son could be found. God heard the prayers of the mother. The abbot of that monastery, where Luke had fled, dreamed on three consecutive nights that a certain woman sharply rebuked him because he took away her only son. The abbot then ordered Luke to immediately return to his mother. Luke went, visited with his mother and once again, parted from her without returning. He atoned on "Mount Johannitsa," near Corinth. At night he prayed to God and during the day he worked in the garden and in the field, not for his sake but for the sake of the indigent and the visitors. However, Luke fed only on bread made of barley. God bestowed upon him the gift of working miracles. Luke died peacefully in the year 946 A.D. From time to time, Chrism [oil] flowed from his relics.

3. THE VENERABLE MASTRIDIA

Mastridia lived in Jerusalem where she led an austere life of asceticism. A certain young man fell in love with her and began to annoy her. In order to save herself and this young man from sin, Mastridia took a small basket of moistened berries and retreated into the wilderness. She spent seventeen years in the wilderness and during the entire time, by the power of God, neither did she lace berries, which she brought, nor did her clothing wear out. Mastridia died peacefully about the year 580 A.D.

4. THE ONE-THOUSAND THREE MARTYRS AT NICOMEDIA

They all suffered from Christ during the reign of Emperor Diocletian.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS AT NICOMEDIA

The city of Nicomedia, as a star, shines,
As Venus, the star; the eastern throne.
But, one day, by the will of Duclianus,
Four courtiers were beheaded,
Eusebius, Vasa, Eutychius, Courageous
And wonderful Basilides, by glory unfaded,
For the Name of Christ, were beheaded
And by this, Nicomedia was darkened.
Those four heads, the end of the horror were not
But only the first blossoms of the mown grass:
A thousand slaves; servants, obedient ones,
The four martyrs, that faithfully served,
A thousand as one and, three more,
Created a clamor, as though they drank wine.
No, not wine did they drink, but the truth intoxicated them,
And the Blood and the victory of the Son of God.
O emperor ungodly; we, also, are Christians,
We also are Christians, do whatever you will!
And to go there, we desire
Where our Blessed Master went
O wonderful daring! O wonderful fidelity!
But, the emperor's cruelty, this did not abate,
And a thousand souls departed the earth,
To them opened wide the Gates of Paradise.

REFLECTION

St. Isidore of Pelusium interprets certain words of Holy Scripture in this manner: **"Two [women] will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left" (St. Matthew 24:4)**. This means that many are dedicating themselves to the spiritual life, but with different intentions; some sincerely and steadfastly and others negligently and vainly. The first will be taken into the kingdom of God and the others will be left behind. What does the prayer of the Cup mean? And why did the Lord pray that this cup of Suffering pass from Him? **"O My Father, if this Cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done!" (St. Matthew 26:42)**. This means that no one should seek out adversity but when adversity does come, a Christian should accept it and courageously endure it. Concerning the **Five Foolish Virgins (St. Matthew, Chapter 25)**, St. Isidore says: "Indeed, all of them had retained their virginity, but they did not possess the other virtues, especially charity. Virginity alone is not sufficient to enter the kingdom of God. Virginity does not help at all, if the virgin is proud and selfish.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Sower:

1. As a Sower whose seed grows slowly and surely;
2. As a Sower of the new teaching, new power and new order;
3. As a Sower of the new spiritual food by which mankind will be fed until the end of time.

HOMILY

-About the narrow-minded, to whom crime is closer than the love of God-

"But you seek to kill Me because My word has no place in you" (St. John 8:37).

Why was the word of Christ unable to prevail among the Jewish elders? Because they were so filled with malice that there was no room in them for the divine seed; for the divine good news. All that grew in their souls was the sowing of Satan, the Antichrist. That is why they sought to kill Christ. Through the Blessed Psalmist, the Lord speaks: **"Empty yourselves, [desist] and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)**. Therefore, it is necessary to empty oneself of everything that is opposed to God, i.e., of everything in us that hinders the light of knowledge of God from dwelling in us. When man empties himself of that, then and only then, can he understand that God is God. As long as the soul of man is filled with anti-godly thoughts, anti-godly feelings and anti-godly desires, until then, the soul of man is totally unable to listen or to receive the word of God. Whoever does not have God within him, that one acts by some infernal impulse to uproot God from the soul of him who possesses Him [God]. **"You seek to kill Me."** Why? Because not one divine word of Christ was able to find shelter nor acceptance in their godless hearts. Having nothing in common with Christ the Lord, the Jewish elders, from the beginning, were unable to have any kind of friendly relations with Him.

O Lord Jesus, our Blessed Savior, help us to empty ourselves of all sinful seeds in us, that Your holy word may be able to enter into us and to enlighten, strengthen and resurrect us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR THEODORE STRATELATES

There are martyrdoms more precious than precious. The preciousness of martyrdom depends upon the greatness of the good which a Christian abandons and in lieu of that, accepts suffering; and still, it depends upon the greatness of the suffering which he endures for Christ's sake. St. Theodore, a Roman commander in the army of Emperor Licinius and mayor of the town of Heraclea, scorned his youth, handsome appearance, military rank and the good graces of the emperor. In place of all that, he accepted horrible tortures for the sake of Christ. At first, Theodore was flogged and received six-hundred lashes on his stomach. After this, he was raised on a cross and was completely pierced with lances. Finally, Theodore was beheaded. Why all of this? Because, St. Theodore loved Christ the Lord above all else in the world. He abhorred the stupid idolatry of the superstitious Emperor Licinius. He smashed the idols of silver and gold and distributed pieces of them to the poor. He converted many to the Faith of Christ and called upon Emperor Licinius himself to reject idolatry and to believe in the One Living God. During the entire time of his tortures, St. Theodore said repeatedly: "Glory to You my God, glory to You! St. Theodore suffered on February 8, 319 A.D., at 3:00 p.m. and entered into the kingdom of Christ. St. Theodore is considered the Protector of Soldiers who call upon him for assistance. His miracle-working relics were translated from Euchaita to Constantinople and interred in the church of Balchernaë.

2. THE HOLY PROPHET ZECHARIAH

Zechariah was the eleventh of the Twelve Minor Prophets and together with Haggai, persuaded Prince Zerubbabel to restore the Temple of Jerusalem. Zechariah prophesied the solemn entrance of Christ into Jerusalem: **"On a colt, the foal of an ass" (Zechariah 9:9).** He also prophesied Judas' betrayal for thirty pieces of silver: **"And they counted out my wages, thirty pieces of silver" (Zechariah 11:12)** and the abandoning of Christ by the apostles during the time of His passion: **"Strike the shepherd that the sheep may be dispersed" (Zechariah 13:7).** (*) The Prophet Zechariah is called the "sickle-beholder" because he saw in a vision, a sickle coming down from heaven to mow down the unjust; especially thieves and blasphemers of the Name of God. Zechariah died in the latter half of the reign of Darius Hystapes about the year 520 B.C.

(*) St. Matthew 26:31 - St. Mark 14:27

3. SAINT SAVA II, ARCHBISHOP OF THE SERBS

Sava was the son of King Steven (Stefan) the First-crowned and nephew of Saint Sava I. Before tonsuring, Sava was called Predislav. Following the example of his great uncle [St. Sava] Predislav was tonsured a monk and zealously dedicated himself to a life of asceticism. He was chosen Archbishop of the Serbs, succeeding St. Arsenius under the name of Sava II. He governed the Church with great devotion and love. Sava II died in the year 1268 A.D. His relics repose in the Monastery at Pech.

***HYMN OF PRAISE
SAINT SAVA II, ARCHBISHOP OF THE SERBS***

Predislav stared,
The young Predislav wept,
The Queen Mother asked him,
Where does your gaze roam?
At what are you looking, Predislav?
At Saint Sava, the face of my uncle.
King Stefan, to his son, said:
To marry you off my sweet son,
Time flows and, I am aging,
Whom do you love? Tell me the name!
And Predislav, to his father, listens
And about a wife, does not want to hear.
Predislav fashions himself as a monk
With the words of Christ, he is satisfied
And, Sava the Second, he was called,
Shedding tears and then speaks:
Saint Sava, place me
On the true Evangelical path!
The King and Queen died
And also Patriarch Arsenius,
The Church remained a widow
From honors, Sava hides
Upon him descended dual honors:
He was a bishop and also a saint.

REFLECTION

Saint Seraphim of Sarov writes about despair: "Just as the Lord is concerned about our salvation, so does the devil, the slayer of men, concern himself about bringing the soul of man to despair. Judas the betrayer was faint-hearted and inexperienced in struggle, which is why the devil, seeing him in a state of despair, attacked and persuaded him to hang himself. Peter, the formidable rock, falling into great sin and experienced in struggle, did not despair and did not lose the presence of the spirit, rather he shed bitter tears from a warm heart and, seeing that, the devil fled from him as though burned by fire. Thus, brethren, the Venerable Antiochus teaches that when despair befalls us, we should not succumb to it but, strengthened and enveloped by Holy Faith, say with great bravery to the cunning spirit [the devil]: 'what have you to do with us, O apostate from God, fugitive from heaven and a slave of evil! You are unable to inspire us to do anything; for Christ, the Son of God, has authority over us and over all. And you, O murderer, depart from us! Strengthened by His Honorable Cross, we trample upon your serpent's head.' "

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Commander:

1. As a Commander Who enters into battle against Satan;
2. Who entered into battle against sin in men;
3. Who took up the defense of good against evil in this world;
4. Who defeated Satan, sin and death.

HOMILY

-About how a true Christian encounters hatred in the world-

**"You will be hated for all for My Name's sake"
(St. Luke 21:17).**

All those who love themselves more than they love God will hate the followers of the Lord Jesus.

All those who love the body more than they love the soul will hate the followers of the Lord Jesus.

All those who love this world more than they love the eternal kingdom of God will hate the followers of the Lord Jesus.

All those who love sin more than they love virtue will hate the followers of the Lord Jesus.

The number of those who hate the Name of Jesus is sometimes greater and sometimes smaller. However great is their number brethren, do not be afraid for the number of angels and saints is myriad. The number of your kinsmen in the heavens, i.e., those who love the Lord Jesus, exceeds the number of stars in the firmament and the sands by the sea. O do not be afraid, Christ is with you and that means that you are always mightier than those who hate you. When the most Omnipotent One is on your side, you are always more numerous for you are always stronger than any number of your adversaries.

O Lord Jesus, Lord All-powerful always be with us and help us that we may inseparably be with You always and then our fear will vanish.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 9 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR NICEPHORUS

The biography of this martyr Nicephorus clearly demonstrates how God rejects pride and crowns humility and love with glory. There lived in Antioch two close friends, the learned priest Sapricius and the simple ordinary citizen Nicephorus. Somehow, their friendship turned into a terrible hatred for each other. The God-fearing Nicephorus attempted on many occasions to make peace with the priest. However, at no time did Sapricius desire to be reconciled. When the persecution of Christians began, the presbyter Sapricius was condemned to death and brought to the place of execution. The sorrowful Nicephorus followed after Sapricius beseeching him along the way to, at least, forgive him before his death that they might depart in peace.

"I beseech you, O martyr of Christ," said Nicephorus, "forgive me if I have sinned against you!" Sapricius did not even want to look at his opponent but quietly and arrogantly walked toward his death. Upon seeing the hardness of the priest's heart, God did not want to accept the sacrifice of his martyrdom and to crown him with a wreath but He mysteriously withheld His grace. At the last moment, Sapricius denied Christ and declared before the executioners that he would bow down before the idols. So it is with blind hatred! Nicephorus implored Sapricius not to deny Christ saying: "O my beloved brother, do not do that; do not deny our Lord Jesus Christ; do not forfeit the heavenly wreath!" But, all was in vain. Sapricius remained adamant. Then, Nicephorus cried out to the executioners: "I, also, am a Christian; behead me in place of Sapricius!" The executioners informed the judge of this and he ordered the release of Sapricius and, in his place, beheaded Nicephorus. Nicephorus joyfully lowered his head on the block and was beheaded. Thus, he was made worthy of the kingdom and was crowned with the immortal wreath of glory. This occurred in the year 260 A.D. during the reign of Gallienus.

2. THE PRIEST-MARTYR PETER DAMASKIN

Some think that Peter Damaskin lived in the eighth century and others think he lived in the twelfth century. This difference of thought comes from the fact that there were two Peter Damaskins. The one about whom we are speaking was a great ascetic. He was unselfish beyond measure. Peter Damaskin did not even possess one book; rather, he borrowed books and read them. He read assiduously, gathering wisdom as a bee gathers honey. For a while, he was a bishop in Damascus but when he spoke out against Islam and the Manichean heresy, the Arabs severed his tongue and banished him into exile deep in Arabia. However, God granted him the power of speech so that, even in exile, he preached the Good News [Gospel] and converted many to the Faith of Christ. He compiled and bequeathed to his posterity a precious book about the spiritual life. He died as a confessor and martyr and took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PETER DAMASKIN

**Damaskin numbers eight types of knowledge
For men of spiritual and divine background:**

FIRST

The knowledge of sorrow and all temptations,

SECOND

**The knowledge of the sum of one's transgressions,
one's transgressions and God's forgiveness.**

THIRD

**The knowledge of horror, pain and fear,
Before death, in death and after separation,
when before the righteous judgement, the soul stands.**

FOURTH

**The knowledge of Christ, the Savior,
His life and all the saints,
Of the saints; their deeds, patience and words,
Which, like a silver bell resounds throughout the ages.**

FIFTH

**The knowledge of natural attributes,
Of physical phenomenon; variation and change.**

SIXTH

**The knowledge of forms and things,
Natural phantoms and all sensory beings.**

SEVENTH

**The knowledge of the world; rational and spiritual
The angelic world and the world of Hades; both good and evil.**

EIGHTH

**The knowledge of God,
The One, Holy, Mighty and Immortal.
This knowledge is called Theology
To it, few are rarely elevated;
The greatest purity, a theologian needs
For the impure heart, to heaven does not reach,
Damaskin, the seven elementary knowledges appropriates
And to the eighth, to the knowledge of God he reached.
And the eighth is given by God and by God bestowed,
This is neither learned nor deserved.**

REFLECTION

Saint Peter Damaskin writes about the general and particular gifts of God and says: "The general gifts consist of four elements and all which result from them, as all the wonderful and awesome works of God outlined in Holy Scripture. The particular gifts are those gifts which God bestows upon every man individually whether it be riches for the sake of charity or poverty for the sake of patience with humility; whether it be authority for the sake of justice and the strengthening of virtues or subjugation and slavery for the sake of the expeditious salvation of the soul; be it health for the sake of helping the infirm or illness for the sake of the wreath of patience; be it understanding and skill in gain for the sake of virtue or weakness and lack of skill for the sake of submissive humility. All of this, even though it appears contrary to one another, nevertheless, it is by its purpose very good." In conclusion, St. Peter Damaskin says that we are obligated to give thanks to God for all gifts and with patience and hope to endure all tribulations and evil consequences. For all of that which God gives us or permits to befall us, benefits our salvation.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Source of Joy:

1. In the tribulations of life which only He is able to replace with joy;
2. In the bondage of passions which only He can replace with the joy of freedom;
3. In death, from which he alone can resurrect us.

HOMILY

-About the word of God which is mightier than death-

**"Whoever keeps My word will never taste death"
(St. John 8:52).**

As long as a candle burns in a room, there will not be darkness as long as the candle burns and emits light. If food is seasoned with salt, it will be preserved from spoiling. If someone keeps the word of Christ in his soul, that one keeps salt and light in his soul and life will abide in him. Such a soul will not become dark in this life neither will it taste decaying death.

Whoever keeps the word of Christ in himself, the word of Christ sustains him from within and feeds him and enlightens him and enlivens him. Whether he is in the body or outside the body, he feels equally alive from the word of Christ, i.e., from the undying eternal life. The death of the body will give to his Life-bearing soul only a freer enthusiasm in embracing Christ, the Beloved Life-giver.

But, what does it mean, brethren, to keep the word of Christ within ourselves? That means; **First:** to keep the word of Christ in our mind, thinking about it; **Second:** to keep the word of Christ in our heart, loving it; **Third:** to keep the word of Christ in our will, fulfilling it in deeds; **Fourth:** to keep the word of Christ on our tongue, openly confessing it when it is necessary to do so. Thus, to keep the word of Christ means to fill ourselves with it and to fulfill it. Whoever would keep the word of Christ in this manner, truly, he will never taste of death.

O our Lord, Mighty Lord, mightier than death, give us strength and understanding to keep Your holy word to the end; that we do not taste of death and that death does not taste of us; that decay does not touch our soul. O Lord All-merciful be merciful to us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 10 -

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR HARALAMBOS [CHARALAMPUS]

This great saint Haralambos was a bishop in Magnesia and suffered for Christ in his one-hundred and thirteenth year. When a terrible persecution began during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, the Elder Haralambos did not hide from the persecutors but freely and openly preached the Faith of Christ. He endured all tortures as though he were in someone else's body. When they skinned him alive, the forgiving elder said to the emperor's soldiers: "Thank you, my brethren, for in scraping my old body you renew my spirit for a new eternal life." He worked many miracles and converted many to the Faith. Even the emperor's daughter, Galina, abandoned the idolatry of her father and became a Christian. Condemned to death and brought to the place of execution, St. Haralambos raised his hands to heaven and prayed to God for all people that God grant them bodily health and spiritual salvation and that He multiply their fruits of the earth. "O Lord, You know that men are flesh and blood; forgive them their sins and pour out Your Grace on all!" After prayer, this holy elder gave up his soul to God before the executioner lowered the sword on his neck. He suffered in the year 202 A.D. The emperor's daughter, Galina, removed his body and honorably buried it.

2. THE VENERABLE PROCHORUS, THE ORACH-EATER(*)

Prochorus was a miracle-worker of the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. He is called the Orach-Eater because during the time that he lived in the Monastery of the Caves he did not taste of bread, rather he fed on orach, mixing it in his own way and from it prepared a type of bread. Whenever he would give someone his orach bread with a blessing, the bread tasted sweet as though prepared from honey; if someone stole the bread, it was as bitter as wormwood. One time when there was a shortage of salt in Russia, Prochorus distributed ashes to the people as though it were salt. The ashes, which he distributed with his blessing, were as salt. However, the ashes which someone would take on their own, was as ordinary ashes. Prince Svyatopolk ordered all the ashes from Prochorus' cell be taken to his palace without the permission and the blessing of the monk, Prochorus. When the ashes were removed, those who tasted of it were convinced that it was ashes and not salt. Then Prochorus told the people who came to him for salt to go to the emperor's palace and when the prince tosses out the ashes from his residence, to take them and carry them home as though they were salt. The people did so and again, the ashes were as salt. Believing in this, the prince himself was filled with respect and love toward the holy Prochorus, so that when he died in the year 1107 A.D., the prince, with his own hands, placed Prochorus in the tomb along side the great Russian Saints Anthony and Theodosius.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT HARALAMBOS [CHARALAMPUS]

The untrained sword brandished over Haralambos, only to be lowered!

The saint knelt, and a petition to God, raises

O Lord, release me!

Of all sinful men, release the sins;

Have mercy again

Bless their labor and on the field grant abundant fruit!

Let them have everything; blood and flesh they are

Let them sing to you

O grant them health; health and joy,

Let them remember You!

Every evil drive away, from misery save them,

Have mercy on them all,

And after death, to Paradise take their souls,

Lord Have mercy!

Whoever, to Your Haralambos, prays,

And my name mentions,

Help him O God, because of my suffering,

Help because of me!

Then, from heaven, a voice came: I accept your prayer

Now render me your soul!

The saint, his soul releases and to Paradise flies

Before the sword falls!

REFLECTION

Many of the weighty difficulties which befall man have their cause, known or unknown, in his past. However, the causes of these weighty difficulties, let us say mental disorder, are nothing else than the transgression of the moral law of God.

When St. Haralambos was being tortured, the persecuting emperor found out about his miracle-working power and ordered an insane man to be brought to Haralambos so that the emperor could be convinced that Haralambos could heal him. The devil tormented this man for thirty-five years driving him into the wilderness and hills and hurling him into mud or into gorges. When this deranged person approached Haralambos, the demon sensed a sweet-smelling fragrance emanating from this holy man and shouted: "I beg you, O servant of God, do not torment me before my time, rather command me and I will depart and, if you wish, I will tell you how it came about that I entered into this man." The saint commanded the demon to relate the story. The demon said: "This man wanted to steal from his neighbor and thought to himself: 'If I don't kill the man first, I will not be able to seize his goods.' He proceeded and killed his neighbor. Having caught him in the act, I entered him and behold for thirty-four years I dwelt in him." Upon hearing this, the saint of God commanded the demon to depart from the man immediately and to leave him in peace. The demon departed and the demented man was restored to health and became tranquil.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Beauty of the entire created world:

1. As the Beauty of all created things; the beauty paled from fear and the melancholy of sins;
2. As the Beauty of man, the most rational being in the material world; the beauty paled by fear and melancholy of sins;
3. As the Beauty of a pure mind; of the bodiless world of the angels;
4. As the Beauty of the Holy Trinity revealed by Him and through Him.

HOMILY

-About the sin of those who assert that they can see-

"If you were blind you would have no sin" (St. John 9:41).

These words were spoken to the Jews by Him Who gave them the Law through the prophets that the Law may serve them as the sight of the soul. The Jews received that sight but they closed their eyes intentionally and nefariously. That is why the Just Lord spoke these righteous words to them.

These words are true justice then, today and forever, for a blind man has no sin if he tramples someone else's crop or if he removes someone else's garment instead of his own. If he who has sight commits this, he will be committing a sin and will incur punishment. If he who has eyes, but intentionally closes his eyes and committed that, he also will be committing a sin and will incur punishment.

Nevertheless, what can be said about those who have received Baptism and Chrismation as the two eyes of the soul and, in spite of that, sin as those who are unbaptized? At the Last Judgment, they will not be treated as those who are born blind, rather they will be treated like transgressors who willfully disfigured and blinded themselves.

Still, what can be said about those who received the other Mysteries of Grace in the fullness of Orthodoxy and who have before them the examples of the saints and who constantly listen to the warnings and admonitions of God's Church but, nevertheless, depart and go astray? At the Last Judgment, such will not be able to justify themselves with any type of blindness, rather they will be judged as transgressors who have disfigured themselves and others around them with blindness.

O awesome Lord, save us from sin. O merciful Lord, open our eyes to the path of salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 11 -

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR BLAISE

Blaise was born in the Province of Cappadocia. From his early childhood, he was God-fearing and meek. Because of his great virtues, he was chosen as bishop of the city of Sebastea [in Armenia]. Blaise was a great spiritual and moral beacon in this pagan city. At the time of a grave persecution of Christians, St. Blaise encouraged his flock and visited the martyrs of Christ in prison, especially among them was the eminent and glorious Eustratius. When the city of Sebastea was completely depleted of Christians - some were slain, and others fled - the Elder Blaise withdrew to Mt. Argeos and settled there in a cave. Wild beasts recognized the holy man, gathered around him and he tenderly caressed them. But the persecutors found the saint in this remote place and brought him to trial. Along the way, Blaise cured a young boy who had a bone caught in his throat. To the plea of the poor widow whose pig had been snatched by a wolf, the saint, by the power of his prayer, commanded the wolf to return it. The sinister judges tortured Blaise severely: flogging him and scrapping him with an iron comb. By his steadfastness in the Faith of Christ, Blaise converted many pagans to the Faith. Seven women and two children languished in prison with him. The women were beheaded first and, after that, the wonderful Blaise with these two children was beheaded. He suffered and was glorified in the year 316 A.D. People pray to St. Blaise for the well being of their domestic livestock and for protection against wild beasts. However, in the west, he is also invoked for diseases of the throat.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR GEORGE OF KRATOVO

By origin, George was a Serb from the town of Kratovo. He was a silversmith by trade and, in his heart and soul, was a convinced and a devout Christian. George was eighteen years old when the Turks tried to convert him to Islam. George remained as firm as a diamond in his faith. The Turks tortured him with many cruel tortures and finally burned him at the stake. He suffered for the beautiful Faith of Christ on February 11, 1515 A.D. in Sofia, Bulgaria, during the reign of Sultan Selim and was glorified with unfading glory in the heavens.

3. SAINT THEODORA

Theodora, a Greek empress, was the wife of the nefarious Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast. After the death of Theophilus, Theodora became the ruling empress and reigned together with her son Michael III. At the Council in Constantinople (842 A.D.), she immediately restored the veneration of icons. On this occasion, the Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy was instituted which is still celebrated today on the First Sunday of the Honorable Fast [First Sunday in Lent]. This holy and meritorious woman of the Church gave up her soul to God on February 11, 867 A.D. It was at that time, by the divine and wonderful Providence of God, at the solemn triumph of Orthodoxy over all heresies, that St. Cyril and St. Methodius were sent as Christian missionaries to the Slavs.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERATION OF ICONS

To what, in such a manner, do you my Christian bow,
When you, O my Christian, venerate the icons?
Before the Living God the Creator, I am bowing down,
With all my soul, heart and mind, I bow down to Him.
Mortal am I and, am unable upon Him to gaze,
Therefore, before His image I bow;
What, my Christian, do you so fervently reverence,
When, the icon O my Christian, you kiss?
Christ the God and Savior, I am kissing,
The choirs of angels, the saints and the Mother of God.
Mortal am I and, therefore am unable them to touch,
But when their images I kiss, my heart is at ease.

REFLECTION

Matter is not evil of itself as certain Christian heretics, i.e., the Manicheans and other philosophers taught. Not only is matter not evil, but matter is not the sole conduit of evil, but in as much as matter is a conduit, so also is the spirit a conduit of evil. Every material thing is melancholic and even fearful because of man's sins, but matter is not evil. Matter is corruptible, weak and nothingness in comparison to the immortal spirit, but it is not evil of itself. And, if it were evil, would our Lord Christ have instituted Holy Communion of Bread and Wine and would He call the Bread and the Wine His Body and His Blood? If matter, by itself, is evil, how then, would men be baptized with water? How would the Apostle James have commanded that the sick be anointed with oil? How would Blessed Water [Holy Water] remain beyond spoiling and have miracle-working properties? How would the Cross of Christ have power? How would the garment of Christ transmit the healing power of the Savior by which the woman with the issue of blood was healed? How would the relics of the saints and icons have performed so many miracles and conveyed so much good to people from the kingdom of Grace? Therefore, how then could good come to man through evil? No, no; matter is never evil of itself alone.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Good Merchant Who came into this world as to a market to give and to take:

1. To give His labor and to receive the numerous fruits of joy from that labor;
2. To give Himself to be humiliated, to be spat upon, to be smitten, to be bruised, to be pierced, to be crucified in order to usher the army of His faithful into His eternal glory;
3. To give His Body in order to redeem numerous souls from the multitudes.

HOMILY

-About judging according to the flesh and according to the spirit-

"You judge according to the flesh"(St. John 8:15).

Thus spoke the Omniscience Lord to the wicked Jews: "You judge according to the flesh." They had caught a woman in adultery and wanted to stone her because of her fleshly sin. But the Lord perceived the soul of the woman and saw that she could still be saved and changed, brought her to repentance and released her. For even though she committed the act of adultery, nevertheless, her soul was not totally adulterous. However, the Pharisees constantly bore the sin of adultery in their hearts but they skillfully concealed that sin of adultery and they did not condemn adultery in the heart but condemned the act of adultery of the flesh only against those whom they caught in that act.

Spiritual men judge by the spirit and physical men judge by the flesh. Even today, the Jews, punished and dispersed throughout the whole world, were never able to think spiritually and to judge spiritually, but still think and judge only by the flesh and only externally according to the ordinance of the Law written on paper or in nature, but still never according to the spirit. For, if they had learned to judge men and deeds according to the spirit, they would have immediately recognized the Lord Jesus as the Messiah and Savior.

Let us be on guard, O Christians, that we judge not only according to the flesh. Let us be on guard that we not be too quick to judge him who because of his ineptness slips into misdeed, nor to praise the one who adheres skillfully and does not slip before men but, who, with his heart is already completely in the abyss of sin. Let us be on guard from error, that we not judge men and nature according to sensual impressions and to strive to judge everything spiritually, i.e., by the spirit. Behold we are the children of the spirit and light, for we are baptized.

O Lord Jesus teach us and guide us that we do not think nor judge according to the flesh but rather by the spirit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 12 -

1. SAINT MELETIUS, ARCHBISHOP OF ANTIOCH

Meletius, this great and holy man, was an exceptional interpreter and protector of Orthodoxy. His entire life was dedicated in a struggle against the Arian heresy which did not recognize the Son of God as god and blasphemed the Holy Trinity. On three occasions, Meletius was banished and exiled from his archepiscopal throne to Armenia. The struggle between the Orthodox and the heretics was waged so bitterly that on one occasion, when St. Meletius was preaching to the people in Church concerning the Holy Trinity in unity, his personal deacon, a heretic, raced toward him and covered his mouth with his hand. Not being able to speak with his mouth covered, Meletius spoke in signs. Namely, he raised his clenched hand in the air, opening at first his three fingers and showed them to the people. After that, he closed his hand and raised up one finger. He participated in the Second Ecumenical Council [Constantinople 381 A.D.], where Emperor Theodosius showed him special honor. At this Council, God revealed a miracle through His hierarch. Namely, when Meletius was propounding the dogma of the Holy Trinity to Arius, at first he only raised three fingers, separately one by one, and after that folded them into one. At that moment, before all those present, a light shown like lightening from his hand. At this Council Meletius confirmed Gregory the Theologian on the patriarchal throne in Constantinople. Earlier, however, Meletius had ordained Basil the Great to the deaconate and baptized John Chrysostom. After the close of the Council, St. Meletius completed his earthly life in Constantinople. His relics were translated to Antioch.

2. SAINT ALEXIS, METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW

Alexis was a great hierarch of the Russian Church at the time of the burdensome bondage of the Russian people under the Tartars. Once as a child, he was hunting birds and, asleep in a dream, he heard a voice: "Alexis, why do you labor in vain? I will make you a fisherman of men." At age twenty he was tonsured a monk and in time became the Metropolitan of Moscow. Twice he went among the "golden horde" of the Tartars: the first time to mitigate the wrath of Khan Verdevir against the Russian people and the second time, at the invitation of the Khan Amurat, to heal his wife of blindness. She was blind for three years but her sight was restored when Alexis prayed over her and anointed her with holy water. Following a very laborious and fruitful life, Alexis died in the year 1378 A.D. in his eighty-fifth year and took up habitation in the courts of the Lord.

3. THE VENERABLE MARIA

Maria was a young woman with indomitable courage. After the death of her mother, her father desired the monastic tonsure. Maria did not wish to be separated from her father and they both agreed to journey to a monastery for monks: Maria with cropped hair and in masculine attire, appeared as a young man. Her father died and Maria was tonsured a monk and received the name Marius. In the proximity of the monastery, there was an inn and the daughter of the innkeeper was attracted to Marius, the alleged monk. After unsuccessfully pursuing Marius, the innkeeper's daughter accused Marius of illicit sexual relations with her, for she had become pregnant with someone else and had given birth to a son. Maria did not defend herself and was banished from the monastery with ridicule. With someone else's child in her arms, Maria lived for three years in a grove belonging to the monastery enduring hunger, frost and every difficulty and deprivation. Meanwhile, the innkeeper's daughter went insane and soon after that Maria also died. Only after her death was it discovered that the "monk Marius" was a woman. The deranged daughter of the innkeeper, as soon as she touched the body of St. Maria, was healed and after that acknowledged her terrible sin. St. Maria died and took up habitation in eternal joy in the year 508 A.D.

4. SAINT ANTHONY, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

At first, Anthony was a great ascetic of exceptional charity and later was patriarch during the reign of Emperor Leo the Wise (889 A.D. 912 A.D.). He tonsured his father a monk and founded a monastery over the relics of St. Callia.

5. ST. CALLIA

Callia was generous toward the poor out of pure Christian charity both as a maiden and later as a married woman. Callia's husband was a wealthy but miserly man. Once, when he returned from his business trip, he saw that his wife had distributed his wealth to the poor and then killed her. But God glorified this charitable soul in this manner: many who were ill were healed by her relics. Convinced of this, the Patriarch Saint Anthony, built a monastery over her relics.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY TRINITY

THE HUMAN AND DIVINE NATURE OF CHRIST

Oneness and Threeness, One and Three,
Christ God He is and He is man; one and both,
The greatest and most wonderful, these two mysteries are,
The key of life and being; in them is concealed
Holy Threeness and Oneness, the eternal flame,
Flame eternal; Three torches but one flame.
Oneness and Threeness, one and three
Christ God He is and He is man; one and both.

REFLECTION

St. John Chrysostom cites the following example from the life of St. Meletius, which demonstrates the immense nobility of this great hierarch. "It would be unjust to omit that which occurred during the banishment of Meletius from Antioch. When the governor sat in the coach, and with the saint seated beside him, he began to drive with great speed through the square. From all sides, the citizens hurled stones as hail at the head of the governor, for they could not be parted from their hierarch easily and were prepared to part with life rather than part with this saint. But what did this blessed man do? Seeing the stones flying, he covered the head of the governor with his cloak. Thus, he shamed his adversaries by his enormous meekness and, by this, he taught a lesson to his followers as to what kind of forgiveness we should show toward those who offend us; that it is not enough to refrain from doing them any evil but rather, with all our power, to remove any danger that threatens them." Concerning the external appearance of Meletius, Chrysostom further says: "In truth, the greatest satisfaction was to see his holy face. Not only when he taught or preached but also when men simply looked at him, he was in such a position to instill into the soul of the spectators every virtue.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as an Ascetic:

1. How He fasted not to subdue His All-pure Body, but in order to give us an example;
2. How He fasted for my sake;
3. How I need to fast for the sake of my salvation and for the sake of His love.

HOMILY

-About the wondrous visit of the Son of God-

**"I came from the Father and have come into the world.
Now I am leaving the world and giving back to the
Father" (St. John 16:28).**

Brethren, these words are of crucial importance for us. For of all things in this world, it is most important to know: Is there a God and is there life after death? These words are more precious than all the pearls in the world, more precious than the sun and more precious than the stars, for these words were spoken by Him Who is the most reliable and the most truthful witness. In truth, these words are the source of the greatest joy for us immersed in despair and, after despair, death. These words witness that there is a God and that there is life after death. **"I came from the Father"** before all else, this means that God exists from Whom the Lord Jesus came: **"And I am going back to the Father"** and this means that God the Father exists to Whom the Son of God returns. At the same time, both of these quotations mean that eternal life exists and that death does not mean our annihilation. The Lord spoke these words just before His death.

O sweet and wonderful tidings! That which the heart of all men and nations throughout all ages dimly envisioned, the Lord witnessed as fact as truth.

And further, these words confirm the unity of the Father and the Son as well as the divinity of our Lord and Savior. My brethren, God visited us, the Most-High God Himself; Holy, Mighty and Immortal God. That is the culmination of our comfort and our joy.

O Lord Jesus, Son of God, the true witness of all that is good for which our hearts yearn day and night, sanctify us, strengthen us and make us immortal.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 13 -

1. THE VENERABLE SIMEON [MIROTOCHIVI], FROM WHOSE RELICS FLOWED MYRRH - CHRISM

Stefan Nemanja [Nehemiah], the great ruler [Great Zhupan] of the Serbian people, the consolidator of Serbian lands, creator of the independent Serbian state, defender of Orthodoxy and exterminator of heresy. At first, he was baptized in the Latin Church but later left this Church and embraced the Orthodox Church. In the beginning, he was dependent on the Greeks with regard to the State, but later he freed himself from this dependence and became completely autonomous. When Stefan consolidated the State and the Orthodox Faith in the State, then, following the example of his son Sava, received the monastic tonsure in Studenica Monastery in the year 1195 A.D., and received the name Simeon. His wife Anna withdrew to a convent, embraced the monastic tonsure and received the name Anastasia. After two years as a monk in Studenica, Simeon traveled to Athos, the Holy Mountain. There he took up residence in the Monastery Vatopedi together with his son Sava. Father and son spend their days and nights in prayer. There, they built six chapels dedicated to: the Savior, The Unmercenary Saints, St. George, St. Theodore, The Forerunner and St. Nicholas. They purchased the ruins of Hilendar and erected a glorious monastery in which Simeon lived only eight months and then died. When Simeon was on his deathbed, Sava, according to his father's wishes, placed him on a simple mat. With eyes directed toward the icon of the Mother of God and the Savior, the blessed elder spoke these last words: **"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."** (Psalm 150:6), and took up habitation with the Lord on February 13, 1200 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTINIAN

The glorious and most wonderful life of Martinian is worthwhile to read in its entirety. What did he not endure just to fulfill the commandments of the Lord! At age eighteen, Martinian retreated to a mountain in Cappadocia called "The Place of the Ark" where he lived for twenty-five years in fasting, vigils, prayer and struggling with many temptations. When a woman came to tempt him and, he perceiving that he will succumb to sin with her, Martinian leaped into the fire barefooted and remained in the fire until the pain brought tears to his eyes and subdued any lust within himself. When another temptation erupted, Martinian fled to an isolated rock in the sea and there he lived. During a shipwreck a young woman swam to this rock. Martinian jumped into the sea to avoid any further temptation, but a dolphin rescued him on its back and by God's Providence brought him ashore. Martinian then decided never to make any place his permanent home but to continually travel. In two years, Martinian passed through one hundred and sixty-four towns correcting and counseling people. He finally reached Athens where he died in the year 422 A.D.

3. THE FEMALE SAINTS ZOE AND PHOTINA

At first Zoe was a prostitute and a temptress of St. Martinian. When she saw this ascetic leap into the fire in order to subdue in himself all lust, she bitterly repented, retreated to a convent in Bethlehem where, as an ascetic and recluse, heroically lived a life of mortification. Repenting of all her sins, she received from God the gift of working miracles. By the winds of the sea St. Photina was cast on the island where St. Martinian had isolated himself. Martinian immediately fled the island and Photina remained there in fasting and prayer where she died.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ZOE

The monk in the fire, Zoe looked at with horror
How he burns without complaint, fear and sighing!
With horror and with shame, Zoe repented:
Just to save his soul, O what this man does!
Bowed and begged forgiveness, she began to weep,
To resist evil, asked, what to do,
To save the soul, to resist evil in the flesh.
The man of God, from joy, he too began to weep.
To Bethlehem, to the blessed Paula he sent her:
Depart woman, save yourself; go and do not perish,
Blessed Paula, all else will tell you.
Over the turquoise sea, completely humbled, Zoe departed,
Like a little sister, Paula received and instructed her.
Zoe cries, Zoe listens; endures and remains silent.
So twelve summers passed; twelve years,
As an ascetic, Sister Zoe became known.
Bathes her face with tears and before her death asks God,
Has God forgiven her? Did He or did He not?
At that moment, before the door of Zoe, a blind woman was led
That she may see; You pray, pray, pray!
In tears, Zoe prayed and the woman saw;
Zoe recognized, thus recognized that she is forgiven
Through sinners, when they repent, God is glorified,
Then, they on earth, with miracles shine like the stars.

REFLECTION

The great Stefan Nemanja, whose authoritative words everyone unconditionally heeded to and at whom people and emperors trembled, became a monk and served the monks of the Holy Mountain [Athos] as an ideal example of meekness, humility, goodness and piety. Even his death was the death of a truly godly-man and spiritual director. He became bedridden on February 7. He summoned St. Sava, placed his hands on him and blessed him saying: "My beloved child, the light of my eyes, comfort and protector in my old age! Behold the time of our separation has arrived. Behold the Lord is releasing me in peace. But you, my child, do not mourn because of our separation. For parting is the common cup of all and everyone; here we part from one another but we will meet there where there is no separation." On February 12, St. Simeon asked Sava to clothe him in a burial cassock, to spread a mat on the ground, lay him there and place a stone under his head. He then summoned all the monks and asked their forgiveness. At dawn, on February 13, while the monks were chanting the Office of Matins in church and the voices were reaching the cell of the dying one, St. Simeon, once more his face radiated and he gave up his soul to his God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God:

1. As a Lamb born in the dwelling place of lambs;
2. As a Lamb persecuted by men of lupine temper such as Herod and others;
3. As the Sacrificial Lamb Who patiently endured pain and death;
4. As the Victorious Lamb of God on the Heavenly Throne.

HOMILY

-About love above every other love-

" Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (St. Matthew 10:37).

The entire Gospel teaches that we should leave the lesser for the sake of the greater; the transient for the intransient; the worst for the sake of the best; the less valuable for the sake of the more valuable. If the Good News [Gospel] would not promise greater value, who would leave the lesser? If the Gospel would not reveal the glow of the precious goods, who would leave the less valuable goods? Who would leave honey and milk if he did not find something sweeter? Who would leave father and mother if he did not find someone closer in kinship? Who would leave children and friends if he did not recognize someone more dear? Who would willingly give up his life to suffering and death if he did not perceive immortal life? The Lord Christ is sweeter than honey and milk; He is a closer kin to us than our father and mother; more dear to us than our own children and friends; more precious than all visible treasures; more costly than this life for He gives life eternal. Everything in the world compared to Him [Christ] is inferior, trivial, bitter, weak, less valuable and transitory. Whoever receives Him [Christ] it is easier for him to leave everything; everything, because he has received the best and Him Who is the very best.

O Lord Jesus, the Treasury of all eternal riches, help us to unbind ourselves from everything and to cling to You, our Good and our Life

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 14 -

1. THE VENERABLE AUXENTIUS

Auxentius was a very prominent aristocrat among the noblemen and courtiers at the court of Emperor Theodosius the Younger in Constantinople. Enflamed with love for Christ, Auxentius was tonsured a monk and remained for a short time in Constantinople. When men began to praise him, he fled from their praise and settled on a mountain called Skopa near Chalcedon, which later was referred to as Auxentius' Mountain. His desire to remain there permanently, hidden from men, was not realized for some shepherds discovered him and made his whereabouts known. They began to bring the sick to him for healing. He healed many. He restored sight to the blind; cleansed lepers anointing them with oil; he also raised the palsied and freed many who were demon possessed. All of this was reason for amazement, but his humbleness was cause for even greater amazement. Whenever he was implored to heal someone he defended himself with the words: "I, also, am a sinful man!" Compelled by many requests, he approached healing in the following manner: he either invited all present to pray to God together with him for the sick person; or he first strengthened the faith in the people and then he told them that God will give to them according to their faith; or he prayed over the head of the sick person: "The Lord Jesus Christ heals you!" He did this so that the act of working miracles would not be attributed to him but rather to God Almighty. He participated at the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon, 451 A.D.] and strongly defended Orthodoxy against the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies. In the year 470 A.D., the Lord took his youthful soul in his old age and his aged body remained in the earth from which it was created.

2. THE VENERABLE ISSAC, RECLUSE OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Issac lived during the time of Saints Anthony and Theodosius. He came to the monastery as a wealthy merchant. He left all and distributed everything to the poor and dedicated himself to the most strict form of asceticism in an enclosed cell. St. Anthony himself passed one prosfora(*) through an opening every other day. Deluded by demons who appeared to him in angelic light he bowed down to them and, after that, he bowed down before Satan himself believing that he was Christ. Because of that he became ill, and remained ill for two years after which he regained his health and became a more cautious and a more experienced ascetic. Because of this, before his death, God bestowed upon him abundant Grace. He died in the year 1090 A.D.]

(*) The Prosfora is the bread offered for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy from which the Lamb [Agneć-Amnos] is removed and later consecrated and becomes the Body of Christ in Holy Communion.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT AUXENTIUS' VISION OF SAINT SIMEON STYLITE

Auxentius, the adornment of Orthodoxy,
One night in mute silence
With tears, prayed to God,
Was lifting himself up in spirit to heaven,
With flaming wings, as a cherubim.
While the saint turned his gaze
To the swarm of stars in the heavenly firmament;
The elder looked and began to weep.
The priest-monks (hieromonks) asked him,
To tell them, what he saw,
And why did the elder begin to weep?
My children, priest-monks (hieromonks),
The soul of Saint Simeon, I saw,
The great Stylite, Simeon,
A pillar of Orthodoxy, a pillar of faith,
This night, the Stylite died,
His soul is being ascended to heaven,
Brighter than the stars, a glowing flame,
By us, his soul visited,
Me, a sinner, he graciously greeted.
Many nights have passed, since that night,
Until the news arrived about the death of the Stylite,
The truth of the vision, all recognized
That which Saint Auxentius beheld.

REFLECTION

Why do men leave one place and settle in another place? Primarily because they hope that they will be more fortunate in the other place. And in truth, from the worldly point of view of life and contentment, places can be different; better or worse. He, who does not hope in a better life after death, seeks a better sensual pasture in this life. But if we listen to the hearts of those men, who were able and capable to live in the so-called best places on the globe of the earth, we will detect dissatisfaction, sorrow and despair. They did not find that which they were seeking. They ate to over satisfaction in every place, and finally, still hungry, they gaze death in the eyes.

But look at the Christian saints! They sought places with the least earthly pastures; places that were "arid, impassible and devoid of water" isolated places and terrible places that attracted the least attention and for which no one competes. They considered every place on earth equally worthless, but they chose those places solely because they wanted to draw nearer in the spirit and mind to their eternal homeland. And, if one were to listen to their hearts, they would sense joy and contentment.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Parent who weeps for His children in the wilderness calling to them and gathering them:

1. At that time, the children of the nation of Israel;
2. The children of all peoples on earth;
3. The children of all times from creation until the end.

HOMILY

-About the reversed values in the Kingdom of God-

"But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (St. Matthew 19:30).

"For behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last" (St. Luke 13:30).

How All-wise is He Who spoke these words! He did not say that all the first will be last and all the last will be first, **"but many."** There is not one error in the Gospel and nowhere in the Gospel is there any exaggeration.

Why did the Lord put a limit and did not say **"all"** but rather **"many."** Experience teaches us that some of those who were first in honor on earth remained first in honor with God. There were emperors who, from their thrones, pleased God and, there were men who were without authority until their death, angered God. There were wealthy men, who by their charity and faith, were saved, and there were the indigent who, because of their evil and unbelief, received condemnation. There were learned men who kept the faith and did good deeds and there were unlearned men who rejected both faith and good deeds. And so, there were some who were first here on earth who remained first there in heaven also and there were some who were last here [on earth] and remained last there [in heaven] also.

But alas, **"many"** first here became last there. And, O the joy, O the justice of God; how **"many"** who were last here have become **"first"** there!

The Lord did not emphasize neither praised one class, or one occupation over all others, but He recruited and even today He recruits an army of light from all classes, from all occupations and professions. For Him the criteria of man is not a crown nor a beggar's pouch, but rather faith - faith and good deeds.

O All-wise Lord, remember us also in Your Kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 15 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE ONESIMUS

Onesimus was one of the Seventy Lesser Apostles. He was a slave of Philemon but transgressed against his master and fled to Rome where he heard the Gospel from the Apostle Paul and was baptized. Since the Apostle Paul earlier converted Philemon to the True Faith, he reconciled the two of them, Philemon and Onesimus, master and slave, writing a special epistle to Philemon. It is one of the most emotional compositions which exists in Holy Scripture. **"I urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment. Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me"** (Philemon 1:10,15,16). Moved by this letter Philemon, indeed, received Onesimus as a brother freeing him from slavery. Later, Onesimus was consecrated a bishop by the apostles themselves and accepted the episcopal throne at Ephesus following the Apostle Timothy. This is evident from the Epistle of Ignatius the God-bearer [Theophorus]. At the time of Trajan's persecution, Onesimus, already an old man, was arrested and brought to Rome. In Rome, Onesimus gave an accounting of himself before judge Tertycus, was imprisoned and finally beheaded. A wealthy woman removed his body, placed it in a silver__arcophagus and buried it honorably in the year 109 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE EUSEBIUS, A SYRIAN HERMIT

In the beginning Eusebius lived an asectical life under the direction of holy men and later he withdrew and became a recluse. He fed entirely on plant life. He did not even taste fruit. He spent all of his time in prayer in the open spaces enduring all conditions of weather. He lived to be ninety-five years of age and died peacefully in the year 440 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ONESIMUS, THE APOSTLE

The all glorious Onesimus, as a slave his life began,
And ended as an apostle of Christ and martyr.
For his name, the lawless Tertylus asked him?
My name is Christian, my surname Onesimus.
A freeman or someone's slave are you?
A slave of Philemon I was and a slave of Christ the God I am.
For what price did Philemon sell you [to Christ]?
His blood for me, the Lord Christ gave.
Tell me; the idols of the State, you do honor?
Gods I do not see but only statues
Various animals; all dead statues;
I see an ox and to the ox sacrifices offering
Thus the ram to rams, birds to owls -
Living animals to the dead beasts,
More alive to the more dead; stronger to the weaker.
No, to such gods I do not bow down!
But to the Living Lord, my Master
And Creator; mine and yours O Tertylus.
The man of God, Tertylus mocked.
That by the sword, ordered that he be beheaded!
Master over the body, his head severed,
But neither the soul nor the glory did they cut off.
The glorious name Onesimus remained -
That heaven and earth, of him, be praised.

REFLECTION

For every man, peace of soul is precious. With those who have attained peace of soul, the body can be in constant motion; in work, in pain, but their souls, affixed to God, always remain in unwavering peace. St. Seraphim of Sarov teaches: "It is necessary to concern oneself with all means in order to preserve peace of soul and not to be disturbed by the insults of others. That is why it is necessary, at all costs, to restrain yourself from anger with the help of vigilance over one's self, preserving the mind and heart from indecent movements. For preserving peace of soul, it is also necessary to avoid judging others. By not judging and by silence, peace of the soul is preserved. When a man is in such a state of mind, he receives divine revelations. In order for man to be preserved from judging others, he must be vigilant over himself; he must not receive from anyone non-spiritual thoughts and he should be dead toward everything worldly. We must tirelessly guard the heart from indecent thoughts and influences. **'With closest custody, guard your heart for in it are the sources of life.'** (Proverbs 4:23). From perpetual vigilance over the heart, purity is born, in which the Lord is seen according to the words of eternal truth: **'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God'** "(St. Matthew 5:8).

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a Traveler:

1. How He is wearied by traveling, perspiring, hungry and thirsty for my salvation, for your salvation and for the salvation of all men;
2. How even at night, He labors for my salvation, for your salvation and for the salvation of all men;
3. How on every journey, He thinks, He worries and He desires salvation for me, for you and for all men.

HOMILY

-About the believing people and the unbelieving elders-

"When the Messiah [Christ] comes, will He perform more signs than this man has done?" (St. John 7:31).

The Lord Jesus performed miraculous works before all and all saw but not all believed. The people witnessed His miracles and believed in Him. Servants heard His words and believed in Him. But the leaders of the people and the masters of the servants also witnessed His miracles and did not believe in Him. And so, in those days the words of the Savior came true: **"But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first"** (St. Matthew 19:30). **"For behold, some who are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last"** (St. Luke 13:30). Those who were first in honor and authority were last in having faith in Him; and those who were last in honor and authority were the first in having faith in Him.

Why did the people and servants believe and the princes and scribes not believe? Because, the people and servants considered themselves insignificant and unimportant and did not have any personal pride nor envy toward Christ. The people and servants, without malice and prejudice, looked upon the divine miracles and listened to the divine words and were amazed and rejoiced. The princes and the scribes considered themselves first among the people and in the world and so they were filled with pride and envy and were unable, even for a moment, to look upon the miraculous works nor to listen to the divine words without malice and envy.

Brethren, do you see how man, without humility and meekness, is unable even to recognize truth nor to rejoice in the truth? Do you see how the proud and the envious do not even allow God to be ahead of them? As did Satan, at one time!

Lord Jesus, eternal truth cleanse our hearts of pride and envy that we may be able to see You and to rejoice in You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 16 -

1. THE TWELVE HOLY MARTYRS WHO SUFFERED DURING THE REIGN OF EMPEROR DIOCLETIAN

Pamphilus, the first of the martyrs, was a presbyter of the church at Caesarea in Palestine. He was a learned and devout man who corrected the text of the New Testament from the errors of the various copiers. He alone, recopied this salvific book and gave it to those who desired it. The **second** was the **Deacon Valentine**, old in years and grey in wisdom. He was an excellent authority of Holy Scripture and knew them completely by heart. The **third** was **Paul**, an honorable and distinguished man who, during a previous persecution, was cast into the fire for Christ. Besides them, there were five brothers, according to the flesh and spirit, who were born in Egypt and were returning to their homeland after being forced to work in the mines of Cilicia. At the gates of Caesarea they declared that they were Christians for which they were brought to court. To the question: "What are your names?" They responded: "The pagan names which our mother gave to us, we discarded and we call ourselves: **Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Samuel and Daniel**." To the question: "Where are you from?" They responded: "From Jerusalem on High." All of them were beheaded and with them a young man **Porphyrus** who sought the bodies of the martyrs in order to bury them. **Porphyrus** they burned alive as well as **Seleucus**, formerly an officer who had approached and kissed the martyrs before the sword fell on their heads. Also the aged **Theodulus**, a servant of a Roman judge, who, during the funeral kissed one of the martyrs. Finally **Julian**, who revered and praised the lifeless bodies of the martyrs. And so they gave little for much, the inexpensive for the precious and mortality for immortality and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 308 A.D.

2. SAINT MARUTHAS

Maruthas was Bishop of Tagrith in Mesopotamia. He was known for his faith and goodness. Maruthas mitigated the anger of the Persian Emperor Yezdegerd toward Christians, begged from him the relics of the four-hundred martyrs in Persia and founded a town called Martyropolis, where he reposed these holy relics. He ended his earthly course and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 422 A.D.

3. THE HOLY VENERABLE MARTYR ROMAN

Roman was a simple and illiterate peasant from Carpenesion. Learning of the heroism and glory of the martyrs of Christ, the young Roman desired martyrdom for himself. He went to Thessalonica where he began to praise the Faith of Christ on the streets and referred Islam as a fable. The Turks tortured him horribly and then sold him to a galley captain. Christians ransomed him from the captain and sent him to the Holy Mountain [Athos] where he was tonsured a monk by the illustrious Elder Acacius. But Roman further desired martyrdom for Christ. With the blessing of the Elder Acacius, Roman traveled to Constantinople pretending insanity and began to lead a dog along the Turkish streets. To the question: "What are you doing?" Roman responded that he is feeding the dog as Christians feed the Turks. The Turks threw him into a dry well, where he remained without bread for forty days. They then removed him from the well and beheaded him. A light emanated from his body for three days. An Englishman removed his body and took it to England. A certain monk dipped a towel in the blood of the martyr. This towel is preserved, even today, in the Dochiariu Monastery [Mt. Athos]. This glorious soldier of Christ suffered in the year 1694 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TO THE HOLY MARTYRS

Martyrs of Christ, flowers bountiful,
Which will never and forever not fade away.
Martyrs of Christ, an evergreen living in the winter,
You who stretched toward heaven stained with blood,
Martyrs of Christ, aromas of incense,
And the votive light of oil, illumined by God.
You ran the race for the beauty of Christ
In Paradise, met with Christ forever.
The world will be and then cease to be and you will always be
With the Lord in Paradise, to rejoice eternally.

REFLECTION

The most important thing in a meadow is grass. In a field, it is wheat. In a garden, it is vegetables. No one boasts about the enclosure of the meadow more than they do the hay in the meadow. Nor does anyone boast more about the shed in the field than they do the wheat in the field. Neither does anyone boast of the ditches more than they do the vegetables in the garden. Why do people boast about their countries; the roads throughout the country; the demarcations and boundaries of a country and cities throughout the country and everything else that is not more important from the enclosures of the meadows, neither the shed in the field, neither the ditches in the garden when it is compared to the main crop, i.e., with man? Men do not exist for the sake of the country but the country exists for the sake of men. Christ did not come to save countries, but men. A country receives its value from good citizens. And what do evil people receive from a great country? Thorns in a spacious field.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus how in the dark nights, alone in the mountains, He prays for my salvation, your salvation and for the salvation of all men:

1. How He lifts His hands up toward heaven; how He bends to the ground; how He kneels in prayer many nights; in prayer for my salvation, your salvation and for the salvation of all men;
2. How He sweats at prayer and weeps for my salvation, your salvation and for the salvation of all men;
3. How He kept watch and kept vigil in prayer and torments His body without sleep and rest for my salvation, for your salvation and for the salvation of all men.

HOMILY

-About that awesome stone-

**"Everyone who falls on that stone will be [dashed]
smashed to pieces" (St. Luke 20:18).**

The Lord Christ is the corner stone. **Judas** fell on that stone and was smashed. **Herod** fell on that stone and he was smashed. **Julian the Apostate** fell on that stone and he was smashed. **Arius** fell on that stone and he was smashed. The **deniers** and **scoffers** of Christ fell on that stone and were smashed as clay pots of a potter.

This stone fell on **Sodom and Gomorrah** and Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. This stone fell on **Egypt** and Egypt was destroyed. This stone fell on **Jerusalem** and Jerusalem was destroyed. This stone fell on the **Jewish people** and the Jewish people were scattered into pieces. This stone fell on many **sinful generations** and empires and those sinful generations and empires fell apart into dust and ashes.

The Lord forgave sinners seventy times seven but beyond that if sinners remain sinners, will the Lord save them against their will? He will not, for that is not the principle for the salvation of men. The principle of salvation is that men voluntarily consent to salvation on the part of God. If men seventy times seven and more do not desire to be saved by God, then God will not save them. Then men will be smashed against that stone around which they cannot pass and are destroyed by that stone, which they have raised to cast far away from themselves. Can it be said that God is unmerciful Who saved the penitent thief on the cross? Can it be said that He is unjust when He handed over the thief to destruction who mocked Him even in the last hour of death?

O Lord Almighty, save us!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY -17-

1. THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR THEODORE TIRO

The word Tiro means recruit. Just as soon as Theodore had entered the army in the Marmarite regiment in the town of Amasea then the persecution of Christians began under the Emperors Maximian and Maximus. As Theodore did not try to conceal the fact that he also was a Christian, he was dragged to court and thrown into prison which was then locked and sealed because the nefarious judge wanted Theodore to die of starvation. The Lord Christ Himself appeared to Theodore in prison and encouraged His martyr, saying to him: "Fear not Theodore, I am with you; do not partake of earthly food and drink anymore, for you will be with Me in the other world in the heavens; eternal and permanent." At that moment there appeared a multitude of angels in the prison and the entire prison shown brightly and the guards, seeing angels dressed in white raiment, became very frightened. After that, St. Theodore was taken out, tortured and condemned to death. Theodore was tossed into a fire and gave up his holy soul to God the Most High. He suffered in the year 306 A.D.

2. VENERABLE THEODOSIUS THE BULGARIAN AND ROMAN HIS DISCIPLE

As a monk, St. Theodosius settled not far from the city of Trnovo [Bulgaria] where he established a monastic community, which was named after him. He notably distinguished himself at a council in Bulgaria against the Bogomils in the year 1360 A.D. Protecting the Orthodox Faith at this council, by his reasoning, he shamed the Bogomils. He ended his earthy life in Constantinople in the year 1362 A.D. His disciple, Roman, continued to live a life of asceticism in Theodosius' community until his death.

3. SAINT MIRIAM

Miriam was the sister of the Holy Apostle Philip. She traveled with her brother and together with him preached the Gospel in Hierapolis and in other places. Following the martyr's death of Philip, Miriam continued her missionary work in Lycaonia where she died.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THEODORE TIRO

"Do not be afraid of the world for I have overcome the world." (*)

These are holy words both then and now.

For all who suffer, that is the true balm,

Mostly for the glorious martyrs of God.

Why should you, of the more fearful ones, be afraid?

Of its own shadow, the world is afraid!

The powerful and the ruling ones, why fear?

And of dying things, constantly dying?

Who is with the Householder is not afraid of the house,

The Householder sees everything that is in the house,

And nothing there is, that He would not know,

And His servant, what should he be afraid of?

And yet when he hears the Lord as He says:

"Do not be afraid of the world!" What more do you desire?

"Do not be afraid of the world for I have overcome the world!"

Our Lord reigns and rules over the world.

At the fire and death, Theodore smiled,

For that, wreaths he received, that never fades.

(*) St. John 16:33

REFLECTION

An artist is one who, from crude and shapeless stone, carves and shapes forms similar to living creatures. An artist is one who weaves a multi-colored blanket from the wool of sheep. An artist is one who builds a magnificent palace out of earthly bricks. But what kind of artist on earth can be compared to Christ the Artist, who from illiterate men creates wise men, who from fishermen creates apostles, who from cowards creates heroes, who from the immoral creates saints? But all must be given over to the hand of the artist, in order to be fashioned into that which the artist knows and is capable of doing. All things, in truth, must be given over to the hand of the artist. Even men must give themselves over to the hand of Christ, in order for Him to carve, to weave or to build that which only He knows and is capable of. Nineteen past centuries witness to us, that all of them who did not protest [against Him] but rather gave themselves over to Christ the Artist and from the boorish and the ignorant became angel-seeing children of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as an Artist above artists:

1. Who, from the body of man, which became savage from passions, creates a noble organ of every good work;
2. Who, from the chaos in the soul of man, creates the cosmos; a pure and shining mirror of the glory of God;
3. Who, from ignoble men creates an undefiled kingdom, a State of the holy - an artistic work without precedence and without comparison.

HOMILY

-About death as sleeping-

"All were weeping and mourning for her, when He said: 'Do not weep any longer, for she is not dead but sleeping.' And they ridiculed Him because they knew that she was dead" (St. Luke 8 52;53).

The reference here is about the dead daughter of Jarius. Jarius himself said that his daughter had died and his servants confirmed this. But, the Lord, the Giver-of life said: **"Do not weep, she is not dead"** and they ridiculed Him **"because they knew that she was dead."** The ignorant pretend that they know better than the Knower. The blind pretend that they see better than the All-seeing One [The Discerner]. But when the young girl arose and showed herself alive, the ignorant **"were utterly astounded" (St. Mark 5:42).**

Even today, the ignorant ridicule when they hear the divine truth. **Divine truth speaks:** There is a Living God! And the ignorant ridicule as though knowing that there is no God. **Divine truth speaks:** There is a Heavenly Kingdom! And the ignorant ridicule even this as though they know that there is not a heavenly kingdom. **Divine truth asserts:** The dead will resurrect! And the ignorant even deny this as though they know that this will not be. And when God appears and the angels of God appear, and the Kingdom of Heaven is made known, and the dead resurrect, then the ignorant ones will be **"astonished with a great astonishment" (St. Mark 5:42).**

Who can save the world from the ignorant? No one can save the world except Christ the Omniscience, the Omnipotent. By what can the ignorant be saved? By nothing except by faith in Christ and faith to Christ. Who are the most ignorant ones in the world? They are those who deny whatever Christ claimed and claim whatever He denied. In a word: there are those who think that they know something contrary to the knowledge of Christ. They are the worst and the most dangerous ignorant ones both to themselves and to others.

My brethren, know that everything and everyone can deceive us except Christ the Lord and our Friend. He always knows and we do not always know, except when we look at Him and listen to Him.

O Lord, Merciful and All-merciful, help all the ignorant that, before death and judgment, they may be **"astonished with great astonishment"** and that they too will be saved in the kingdom of Your holy ones.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 18 -

1. SAINT LEO I, POPE OF ROME

Leo was born in Italy of devout parents. At first, he served as archdeacon under Pope Sixtus III and following the death of Sixtus was elevated against his will to the throne of the Pope of Rome. When Attila, with his Huns, drew near to Rome was prepared to destroy and to set fire to the city, Leo came out before him in his episcopal vestments mitigated the wrath of the leader of the Huns and averted the destruction of Rome. As much as Attila allowed himself to be counseled by this holy man so also had he to be afraid of the vision of the Apostles Peter and Paul who stood along side Leo and with flaming swords threatened him. Not only did St. Leo save Rome, but he also contributed much to save Orthodoxy from the heresy of Eutyches and Dioscorus. This heresy consisted in the merging of the divine and human natures of Christ into one and following this, in the denial of the two wills in the person of the Lord Savior. Because of this, the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon 451 A.D.] was convened at which time the Epistle of St. Leo was read. St. Leo had written this epistle and placed it on the tomb of St. Peter, who corrected it. Before his death, Leo spent forty days in fasting and prayer at the tomb of St. Peter, beseeching him to tell him whether his sins are forgiven. The Apostle Peter appeared to him and said that all of his sins are forgiven except the sins of ordaining priests when it is evident how grave a sin it is to ordain one who is unworthy. The saint again fell into prayer until he was told that even those sins were forgiven. He peacefully gave up his soul to the Lord. St. Leo died in the year 461 A.D.

2. SAINT FLAVIAN

Flavian became patriarch of Constantinople following St. Proclus. He was a contemporary of St. Leo the Pope. He fought resolutely against Eutyches and Dioscorus, but did not live to see the Triumph of Orthodoxy at the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon 451 A.D.], for prior to that at a heretical council [Ephesus, 431 A.D.] he was mercilessly beaten trampled upon and died there. Flavian was a faithful soldier of Christ, courageous defender and confessor of the Orthodox Faith. He died in the year 449 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT FLAVIAN

"When pride comes, then comes shame."(*)
That is the word of God, the lesson of life.
Heretics, who are they? The children of pride,
What did they want? Shame, to bring,
That is why they had to endure shame.
Eutyches hoped in the help of the eunuch,
Flavian, in the help of the Spirit of God,
Pride always precedes the fall:
Eutyches perished and Flavian conquered.
Dioscorus, his hope was his fist
That is why all generations despise him.
Flavian beaten and trodden underfoot
Now on earth is glorified and blessed in Heaven.
The truth stands and he was not afraid of anything.
Leo the Roman extended him the assistance of a lion
In defense of the radiant face of Christ.
These two hierarchs and Eulogious the third one
Guided the Church to victory and fortune.
Without such spirits what would the Church be?
A wounded bird with broken wings.

(*) Proverbs 16:18

REFLECTION

With great difficulty and with even greater effort and sacrifice, the tares of heresy were sifted from the wheat of the truth of Orthodoxy. The heretics have always made use of lower means and mediocre persons in undermining Orthodoxy. Archmandrite Eutyches of Constantinople and Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who spread the heretical teaching, that there were not two natures in Christ, Divine and Human, rather one nature, had as their ally in the imperial court the mediocre eunuch Chrysaphius. Empress Eudoxia was secretly aligned with them. Patriarch Flavian, as a lion, fearlessly defended Orthodoxy in which he was assisted by Plucheria, the sister of the emperor. The eunuch Chrysaphius presented to Emperor Theodosius the most disgusting slanders against Flavian in order that the emperor would remove him from the throne and bring in the heretic Eutyches as patriarch. When this and all else did not succeed, the heretics plotted to kill Flavian. At the Robber Council in Ephesus [431 A.D.] they beat him so badly and trampled upon him that St. Flavian, on the third day, gave up his soul to God. What happened in the end? At the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon 451 A.D.), Eutyches and Dioscorus were anathematized. The eunuch was ousted from the court and shamefully ended his life. The Empress Eudoxia was banished from Constantinople to Palestine. Flavian and Plucheria were proclaimed as saints and the Orthodox Faith victoriously confirmed.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus among the Pharisees and Scribes:

1. How He made every effort to uplift the Pharisees and Scribes and to save them, and how they made every effort to overthrow and kill Him;
2. How He wished to correct their every thought and word, and how they wished to twist His every thought and word;
3. How He was saddened, that He could not enliven them and how they were saddened that they were unable to kill Him.

HOMILY

-About the struggle of the weak with the Almighty-

**"And the chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus too"
(St. John 12:10).**

They agreed among themselves to first kill the Maker and then His work. For Lazarus was the work of Christ. What is the use, they nefariously thought, to kill the Miracle-worker and to leave a living witness of His greatest miracle? For then, the people would be inflamed at them as evil doers! But, nevertheless, it happened that they killed Christ and missed Lazarus. And then? And then, they and their think alike - killed scores of His apostles and missed hundreds. Then they killed thousands and missed hundreds of thousands. Then, they killed hundreds of thousands and missed millions. Finally it became clear that behind their backs, even the slain were resurrected to life as mown grass and those designated to be killed before the faces of the murderers, grew as sown grass. In vain did the wise Gamaliel say: **"But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them"** (Acts of the Apostles 5:39). Those who wage war against God throughout the centuries in vain did they hone their own helplessness to mow down the crop of God. The more they cut down, the more the crops of God grew luxuriantly.

O unreasonable combatants against Christ, those of that time and the present! Your mace rebounds from the city of Christ and strikes your own shed and destroys it into dust and ashes. Throughout the ages, you have had enough allies: besides the devil, with you were heretics, idolaters, fanatics, soothsayers, diviners depraved princes and the wealthy, tyrants and all insensitive sinners. Up to now you have been defeated and without any doubt all of your allies together with you will be defeated to the end of time.

For that let it be to You O Almighty and irresistible Lord glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 19 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES ARCHIPPUS, PHILEMON AND APPHIA

Archippus was one of the Seventy Apostles. The Apostle Paul mentions him in his Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. **"And tell Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you received in the Lord' " (Colossians 4:17)** as well as in his letter to Philemon calling him his fellow soldier in the battle: **"To Archippus our fellow soldier" (Philemon 1:2)**. In the town of Colossae, the center of Christianity was in the home of Philemon. Here Christians gathered for prayer. In writing to Philemon, the Apostle Paul called this **"the church at your house" (Philemon 1:2)**. At that time, the apostles ordained their disciples as bishops; some of them in permanent places and others as missionaries traveling to various places. Philemon was one of the latter. Apphia, Philemon's wife, hosted and served in the **domestic church!** At the time of a pagan feast to the goddess Artemis, according to their custom, all the faithful in Colossae, gathered in the home of Philemon for prayer. The pagans, learning of this gathering, rushed and apprehended all the Christians; Philemon, Apphia and Archippus, as leaders. At first, they were whipped and afterwards they were buried up to their waists and they began to stone them. Thus, they killed Philemon and Apphia and, Archippus they removed from the pit barely alive and left him to the amusement of the children. The children pierced him throughout with knives. Thus, this "fellow soldier" in battle ended well in the course of his earthly path.

2. THE VENERABLE DOSITHEUS

Dositheus was a disciple of the glorious Abba Dorotheus who lived in the cenobitic monastic community of the Venerables Serdus, John and Barsanuphius the Great. Dositheus was a kinsman of a general and came to Jerusalem to visit the Holy Shrines. Once while he was gazing upon the icon of the Dreadful Judgment in a church, a woman clothed in purple attire approached him and began explaining the icon to him. Finally, before parting, she said that if you desire to be saved, you should fast, abstain from meat, and pray to God often. That was the All-Holy Virgin Birthgiver of God [The Theotokos]. The heart of the young Dositheus became inflamed, and he desired the life of a monk. Dorotheus received him as his novice [Iskusenik] and ordered him to completely abandon his will and to obey his spiritual father. For a few days, he gave him as much as he wanted to eat. After a period of time, Dorotheus cut down his rations by one-fourth and after a period of time again, by one-fourth, until Dositheus became accustomed to get by with the least amount of food, always saying to Dositheus: "eating is a habit, and as much as a person is accustomed to eat, that much he will eat." He was saved and glorified by total obedience. He remained forever an example of monastic obedience and dedication to his spiritual father. This young saint lived in the sixth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

OBEDIENCE

Obedience without murmuring, salvation complete,
Among the spiritual, the first pearl; stone most precious.
This pearl, from Eve's necklace, unraveled,
And after it, all the goods, by God, bestowed.
The devil speaks both then and now: To God, do not listen,
Rather, according to the thoughts of your mind, live only!
Thus speaks the devil from time immemorial who detested the light,
Thus speaking, the disobedient with his noose he fitted.
Christ came, to the people cried out: the obedient He summoned,
To every call, the disobedient did not respond.
The scene of Paradise from Christ until now, repeats itself,
The obedient to Paradise is raised; the disobedient falls.
To his spiritual father, the true monk is obedient,
The father to the Church, the Church to Christ, her Lord.
Obedience, the reliable path toward salvation is,
Of the spiritual necklace; the first light, the first pearl.

REFLECTION

St. Anthony teaches: "Just as a man comes forth naked from his mother's womb, so the soul comes forth naked from the body. One soul is pure and bright, the second is soiled by sin, and the third is blackened by many sins. If a body comes forth from a mother's womb unhealthy, it cannot live; and so the soul, if it does not attain the knowledge of God through good behavior, it cannot be saved neither can it be in communion with God. The organ of bodily sight is the eye; the organ of spiritual sight is the mind. Just as the body is blind without eyes, so the soul is blind without a correct mind and correct life."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in the midst of the common people:

1. How with love, He teaches the people as a parent teaches his children;
2. How the common people receive His words, astonished by His works and glorify God;
3. How even today, the common people, free from corruption, receive His words with joy and thanksgiving.

HOMILY

-About testing-

"The person who is trust worthy in very small matters is also trust worthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? "
(St. Luke 16: 10-12).

This is how the Householder of both the material and spiritual world speaks. Material wealth He calls "**small**" and the spiritual wealth He calls "**great**." To whomever material wealth is given and proves himself to be selfish, hardhearted, arrogant, unmerciful and godless, to him spiritual wealth cannot be given, for if he is unfaithful in small things, he will be unfaithful in great things; when he is unfaithful in the physical, he will be unfaithful in the spiritual.

Man undergoes a test in a foreign world, and if he passes the test, he will gain his own world; if, however, he fails the test, who will give him his world? Man's true world, his homeland, is the heavenly sublime, divine world. The earthly world, however, is the world of coarseness and deterioration; a foreign world for man. But man is sent into this foreign world to complete a test for that, his true world; for his heavenly homeland.

Both expressions of the Savior, however, are similar in meaning. O how profound and true is their meaning! Just as light disperses darkness, so do these words of the Savior disperse our confusion in relation to that: why are we sent into this life? And what should we do? Whoever is able to read with a pure understanding, to him, everything is said in these two sentences.

Therefore, let us know that God will not bestow the spiritual gifts; the gift of understanding, nor the gift of faith, nor the gift of love, nor the gift of purity, nor the gift of prophecy, nor the gift of miracle-working, nor the gift of authority over demons, nor the gift of discernment, nor the gift of the vision of the heavenly world to him who has gambled and used these gifts for evil - as did the prodigal son - with the gifts of bodily health, or earthly riches or glory and position among men or knowledge of the material world or some other skill or ability.

O Lord Most Gentle, sustain our fidelity toward You in that which You have entrusted to us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 20 -

1. SAINT LEO, BISHOP OF CATANIA

Beneath the volcanic Mount Etna in the town of Catania lived Leo the saint, a good shepherd and compassionate teacher of the people. He had great concern for the sick and the poor. His zeal for the Faith was as great as his charity toward the less fortunate. Appearing in Catania was a magician named Heliodorus who deluded the people with various illusions and greatly demoralized the youth. At one time during the Divine Services, Heliodorus entered the church of God and began his obscenities. St. Leo approached him, tied him to one end of his pallium and led him to the market place of the city. Here, Leo ordered that a large fire be built and when the fire was burning, he stood in the middle of the fire and pulled Heliodorus into the fire. Heliodorus was completely consumed and Leo remained alive and unscathed. All who were bewitched by Heliodorus, and who looked upon him as someone divine, were ashamed. The compassionate and the zealous Leo was proclaimed throughout the entire kingdom as a great miracle-worker who, by his shining miracles, helps men. When Leo ended his course, he took up habitation with the Lord and from his relics flowed healing myrrh [Chrism]. He died in the eighth century.

2. THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR SADOK

Sadok was a bishop in Persia, following St. Simeon. At one time, St. Simeon appeared to him in a dream and said: "Yesterday, I - today, you!" Sadok interpreted these words to his flock as meaning: Last year I [St. Simeon] suffered, this year you [Sadok] will suffer. Indeed that year the Emperor Sapor arrested him with many of the clergy and people and brought them to trial. Sapor first ordered them to worship fire and sun as divinity. Sadok replied: "We are eagerly prepared to die for our God, but we cannot worship the sun nor fire." After that, they were tortured and sentenced to death by beheading. Before being beheaded, Sadok uplifted a prayer to God: "Wash us, O Lord, from our sins in our blood!" Sadok, with his priests and faithful gloriously gave up their bodies to death and their souls to the immortal God. They suffered in the year 342 A.D. or 344 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SADOK

What is the sun? the eye that does not see.

What is fire? a servant without reason.

Emperor Sapor, to Sadok speaks:

Worship the sun and the flame,

The gods which rule the world,

According to the teaching of Zoroaster the wise.

Sadok to the Emperor, gently replied:

To you O Emperor, be health and joy,

But where does the sensible before the senseless, bow down?

Where does the corporeal, the incorporeal glorify?

The sun - beautiful as a thing of God,

The flame - wonderful as a servant of men;

But, can the created, the Creator replace?

Can the dead, a replacement for the living be?

Than the artist, is a painting better?

Than the plower, is the plow more costly?

In the heavens O Emperor, there is only one God,

Omnipotent, Intelligent, Beautiful, and Good,

Of the visible and invisible world, the Creator,

Of everything created, the Designer,

Of all good gifts, He is the giver,

A lover of mankind and Almighty,

Him, the Only-begotten Son revealed.

From the Persian errors, He saved us,

On top of nature, He taught us to stand

And toward the Creator, to turn our face,

To uplift to heaven, our entire soul

There, where our homeland is,

Of angels and men; the homeland -

Sadok spoke - and Sapor beheaded him.

REFLECTION

Water is finer than earth; fire is finer than water; air is finer than fire; electricity is finer than air. Nevertheless, air is a dense element in comparison to the spiritual world and electricity is a dense element in comparison to the spiritual world. Electricity is very fine but the voice is finer than electricity; the thought finer than the voice; the spirit finer than thoughts. The air is fine and it carries the voice over a great distance. Electricity is fine and it carries light over a great distance. Nevertheless, how much more is every deed, every word and every thought of yours carried to all ends of the spiritual world. O how awesome it is to commit sinful deeds and to speak sinful words and to think insane thoughts! To what immeasurable distances are amassed from that on the waves of the spiritual sea! But do not go into the details of the unknown world. The main thing is that you know and that you measure how all of your deeds, words and thoughts unavoidably create an impression on all four sides: On God and the spiritual world, on nature, on men and on your soul. If you train yourself in this knowledge, you will attain a higher level of saving vigilance.

CONTENPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in conversation with Nicodemus (**St. John, Chapter 3**):

1. How Nicodemus, even though a teacher in Israel, did not perfectly comprehend spiritual things;
2. How our Lord intentionally begins the conversation with the question of spiritual birth - a question most inaccessible to the mind of Nicodemus - that by this to bring Nicodemus to meekness and after that to further cultivate him as a good field;
3. How in the beginning, Nicodemus with hesitation and shyness approached Christ (as even today most of our scholars do) and afterwards more boldly.

HOMILY

-About judgment and condemnation-

"Whoever believes in Him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned" (St. John 3:18).

He who believes in Christ the Lord is not condemned for he alone judges himself and directs his footsteps toward the light, which goes before him. As a man in profound darkness who adjusts his footsteps according to the candle in his hand, thus, is the one who believes in Christ, i.e., who has embarked after Christ as after a light in the darkness of life.

He who does not believe **"has already been condemned."** That is, he who does not have a guide on the unknown path just as soon as he took the first step, lost his way and strayed. Who does not believe in Christ is condemned to ignorance, to weakness, to anger, to staggering along the crooked and winding road and intertwining roads, to vice, to despair, and perhaps even to suicide. He is condemned in two worlds: in this world to a senseless physical and deceiving existence and in the other world, to eternal damnation! O how dark is the path of the children of unbelief and how deep is the abyss between their every first and third steps!

O Lord, All-Merciful, in truth we have no one in whom and in what to believe outside of You. You are our Savior from darkness, sin and death.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 21 -

1. SAINT ZACHARIAS PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

During the reign of the Greek Emperor Heraclius, the Persian Emperor Chozroes attacked Jerusalem in the year 614 A.D. Chozroes pillaged the city, removed the Honorable Cross [of Christ] to Persia and took an enormous number of Christians into bondage, among them was Patriarch Zacharias. The Jews assisted Chozroes in committing evil against the Christians. Among the other Jewish wickedness, this one is mentioned: the Jews purchased from Chozroes 90,000 Christians as their slaves and slew them all. The aged patriarch Zacharias remained in bondage for fourteen years. Many miracles occurred in Persia as a result of the Honorable Cross, so even the Persians said: "The Christian God came to Persia." Later on, Heraclius forced the Persian emperor to return the Honorable Cross to Jerusalem along with the patriarch and the remaining captives. Emperor Heraclius himself bore the Cross on his shoulders into the Holy City. St. Zacharias spent his remaining days in peace and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 631 A.D. He was succeeded on the throne by Patriarch Modestus and followed by St. Sophronius (March 11).

2. THE VENERABLE TIMOTHY

Timothy was a recluse in a place called Symbola on the Asiatic side of Mount Olympus. In his youth, Timothy entered a monastery, was tonsured a monk and until old age spent his earthly time in fasting, prayer, vigils and ceaseless labor. He remained pure and chaste throughout his entire life. To the pure and chaste God gives authority over evil spirits and He gave this to Timothy. Though his labors for the salvation of his soul, St. Timothy succeeded to build in himself a beautiful home for the Holy Spirit. This holy man died in the year 795 A.D.

3. SAINT EUSTATHIUS THE ARCHBISHOP OF ANTIOCH

Eustathius was a great zealot and protector of Orthodoxy. As such, he was especially prominent at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea 325 A.D.], where he intellectually and systematically refuted the teaching of Arius. With the other Holy Fathers, Eustathius confessed correctly that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit according to divine Hypostasis [natures]. Following the death of Emperor Constantine, the Arians somehow again gained prevalence and began to bitterly persecute Orthodoxy. St. Eustathius was ousted from his throne and exiled, at first to Thrace and after that to Macedonia. Eustathius suffered much and long until, in the end, he gave up his holy soul to God in the year 345 A.D.

4. SAINT JOHN III SCHOLASTICUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

As an advocate, John was ordained a priest and after that became patriarch in the year 565 A.D. He compiled canons, which were included in the Nomo-Canon. During his time, the divine hymn, The **Cherubic Hymn**, as well as the prayer before Holy Communion of **The Mystical Supper** were included in the Holy and Divine Liturgy.

The Cherubic Hymn

[Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim,
and who sing the trice-holy hymn to the life-
creating Trinity, now lay aside all earthly cares.

That we may receive the King of All, who
comes invisible upborne by the angelic hosts.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!]

Prayer Before Holy Communion

[I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art
truly the Christ, the Son of the living God,
who came into the world to save sinners, of
whom I am first. I believe also that this is
truly Thine own pure Body, and that
this is truly Thine own precious Blood. There-
fore, I pray Thee: have mercy upon me and
forgive my transgressions both voluntary and
involuntary, of word and of deed, committed
knowingly and unknowingly, of knowledge and
of ignorance. And make me worthy to partake
without condemnation of Thy most pure
Mysteries, for the remission of my sins,
and unto life everlasting. Amen.

Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God,
accept me today as a communicant; for I will
not speak of Thy Mystery to Thine enemies,
neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss; but
like the thief will I confess Thee: Remember
me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom.

May the communion of Thy holy Mysteries be
neither to my judgment, nor to my condemnation,
O Lord, but to the healing of soul and body].

John died peacefully and gave up his soul to God in the year 577 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HONORABLE CROSS

Covered with blood, the saving Cross,
As though in a grave, for a long time, covered with darkness!
For three days in darkness, from you [the Cross] a Hero [Christ] dwelled,
And you [the Cross], three hundred years, under the ground lay.
When, from Hades the forefathers He liberated, the Lord arose,
And, when freedom for the Church reigned, You [the Cross] arose.
After that, the Lord, for a little while, remained on earth
And to the faithful, you [the Cross] for sometime, still shown,
Until you [the Cross] adequately helped them to strengthen the Faith,
Until with the sign of the Cross, everyone learned to sign themselves,
Until, by their conscience, the baptized recognized the power of the Cross -
With this, you [the Cross] completed your service with honor,
A thousand seasons if they come and pass, but still,
Your image, your power will not perish.
The faithful, before the Honorable Cross, pray to Christ the God,
Heal all difficulties, heal all pains by the Honorable Cross.

REFLECTION

What is fortune telling? There are three kinds of belief, which have their origin in fortune telling: belief in blind chance, belief in things and belief in the almighty power of the spirits of darkness. Through fortune telling, events are prophesied, the power of things differentiated and an oath is sworn to the spirits of darkness. Not any faith so decisively condemned and rejected fortune telling as did the Christian Faith. Not any faith, except Christianity is free and pure of fortune telling. Other faiths are, more or less, fortune telling and some consist only of fortune telling. Fortune telling means to subject man to lower things and beings lower than man. From this, one can say that fortune telling can be called a belief in darkness. That is why the Apostle Paul speaks: "Avoid profane and silly myths. Train yourself for devotion" (1 Timothy 4:7). Christianity is a Faith of light in two senses: First because it elevates man above chance, above all things and above the spirits of darkness; and Second that it subordinates man only to the authority of the Living, Wise and Almighty God. The All-seeing God exists that is why blind chance does not exist. In spiritual union with this All-seeing and Living God, man can be more exalted than all things and more powerful than all the spirits of darkness.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in conversation with the rich young man: "An official asked him this question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother.' And he replied, "All of these I have observed from my youth." When Jesus heard this he said to him, "There is still one thing left for you: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when he heard this he became quite sad, for he was very rich" (St. Luke 18:18-23).

1. How the rich man sought counsel and was not prepared to sacrifice;
2. How our Lord pointed out to him the way to sacrifice which is necessary for the purchase of eternal life;
3. How the rich man left sorrowfully for he could not part with his riches.

HOMILY

-About fasting and prayer-

"This kind can come out by nothing, but prayer and fasting" (St. Mark 9:29).

This is the saving prescription of the greatest Physician of human souls. This is the remedy tried and proved. Another remedy for lunacy, there is not. What kind of sickness is that? That is the presence and dominance of an evil spirit in a man, a dangerous evil spirit who labors to eventually destroy the body and soul of man. The boy whom our Lord freed from an evil spirit; this evil spirit that had hurled him at times in the fire, at times in the water just in order to destroy him.

As long as a man only philosophizes about God he is weak and completely helpless against the evil spirit. The evil spirit ridicules the feeble sophistry of the world. But, as soon as a man begins to fast and to pray to God, the evil spirit becomes filled with indescribable fear. In no way can the evil spirit tolerate the aroma of prayer and fasting. The sweet-smelling aroma chokes him and weakens him to utter exhaustion. In a man who only philosophizes about faith, there is spacious room in him for the demons. But in a man who sincerely begins to pray to God and to fast with patience and hope, for the demon it becomes narrow and constricted and he must flee from such a man. Against certain bodily ills there exists only one remedy. Against the greatest ill of the soul, demonism, there exists two remedies, which must be utilized at one and the same time: fasting and prayer. The apostles and saints fasted and prayed to God. That is why they were so powerful against evil spirits.

O gracious Jesus, our Physician and Helper in all miseries, strengthen us by the power of Your Holy Spirit that we may be able to adhere to Your saving precepts concerning fasting and prayer for the sake of our salvation and the salvation of our fellow men.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 22 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR MAURICE AND THE SEVENTY SOLDIERS WITH HIM

During the reign of Emperor Maximian there was a great persecution of Christians. In the Syrian town of Apamsea, Maurice was superior of the local army. The pagans reported him to the emperor as being a Christian and a sower of the Christian Faith among the soldiers. The emperor himself came and conducted an investigation. Along with Maurice seventy Christian soldiers were also brought before the emperor among whom was Photinus, the son of Maurice. Neither the emperor's flattery nor threats could sway these heroes. To the threats of the emperor, they replied: "O Emperor, there is no fear in the sound and powerful souls of those who love the Lord!" When the emperor ordered and removed their military belts and garments, they said to him: "Our God will clothe us with incorruptible garments and belts and eternal glory!" When the emperor rebuked them because they despised the military honor given to them by him, they replied: "Your honor is without honor, for you have forgotten God Who gave you imperial authority!" Then the emperor commanded and the executioner beheaded Maurice's son Photinus before his eyes to instill fear in the father and in the others. But, Maurice said: "You have fulfilled our wish O torturer and have sent Photinus, the soldier of Christ before us." Then the emperor sentenced them to a most inhuman death: they were brought to a muddy place, stripped, bound to trees and rubbed them with honey, in order to be bitten by mosquitoes, wasps and hornets. After ten days under the most painful sufferings, they gave up their souls to God and departed to rejoice eternally with the holy angels in heaven. Christians secretly removed their bodies and honorably buried them. These courageous soldiers of Christ suffered about the year 305 A.D.

2. THE MANY MARTYRS IN EUGENIUS NEAR CONSTANTINOPLE

During the reign of Emperor Arcadius, the relics of many martyrs of Christ were unearthed, among whom was the Apostle Andronicus and his female assistant Junia. **"Great Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me."(Romans 16:7).** These relics were discovered according to a revelation from God to a cleric Nicholas Calligraphus. "Their names are known only to God Who has written their names in the Book of Life in the heavens." In the twelfth century, Emperor Andronicus II built a beautiful church over the relics of the Apostle Andronicus.

3. THE VENERABLES THALASSIUS AND LIMNAEUS

Both Thalassius and Limnaeus were Syrian ascetics. One of their unique forms of asceticism was "silence." Following the death of St. Thalassius in 440 A.D., Limnaeus joined St. Maron (February 14) and with him lived a life of mortification on top of a mountain under the open sky.

4. SAINT PAPIUS OF HIERAPOLIS

Papius was a disciple of the holy apostles and a patristic author. From Papius we have testimony of the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, the four Marys and the brothers of our Lord as well as an incomplete but preserved manuscript: **"An Interpretation of the Words of our Lord."**

HYMN OF PRAISE

ST. MAURICE AND SAINT PHOTINUS, SOLDIERS OF CHRIST

Of noble root - of noble vine

The young Photinus; to God a sacrifice, beautiful and well-pleasing.

The father witness as they beheaded his son,

As streams of red blood poured out

Maurice, the father courageous; his heart overcome,

Neither screamed he, nor sorrowed nor a tear shed.

To me dear God, you gave him, he said:

O Good One, for all of your love what better could I give?

Of death, make me worthy as You did Photinus,

You Who, for us, sacrificed Your only Son!

Maurice, of the heavenly kingdom, glorious soldier,

Does not receive a gift from earthly rulers,

But, his company, legion of pride, he encourages;

Before the soul-less idols not to bend,

His company into death he leads and through death to life,

To express this rare beauty, the tongue is too weak.

On our flesh, let the wasps and hornets feed,

Nevertheless, we are not defeated; we are not, O soldiers.

Our blood, let the mosquitoes suck; let them be fed,

On that other side, O my brothers, we shall soon be,

Where all of those reign who fought for the Cross,

We did not betray You! To Christ the God, we shall say.

REFLECTION

Concerning the constant abiding with God, St. Anthony teaches: "Let your soul abide with the Lord at all times, and let your body abide on earth as a statue. Always stand upright before the face of the Lord. Let the fear of God always be before your eyes; and in like manner, remembrance of death, repulsion of everything worldly. Die every day that you may live; for whoever fears God will live forever. Be constantly vigilant so not to fall into laziness and idleness. Abhor all that is worldly and distance yourself from it or else it will distance you from God. Abhor all that will bring ruin to your soul. Do not deviate from God for the sake of transient things. Do not accept the example of one weaker than yourself rather from the one who is more perfect. Before all else continually pour out prayer, give thanks to God for all that would befall you. If you would fulfill all that is commanded, you will receive the inheritance **'What the eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart what God has prepared'** " (1 Corinthians 2:9).

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in conversation with Martha and Mary:

1. How both sisters cordially receive the Lord and desire to hear His word;
2. How Mary is more worried with the spiritual and Martha about the material hospitality of the Divine Guest;
3. How the Lord rejoices more that He satisfies someone with spiritual nourishment rather than He be satisfied with material nourishment.

HOMILY

-About fools, wiser than the world-

"We are fools for Christ's sake" (1 Corinthians 4:10).

Thus speaks the great Apostle Paul who in the beginning was guided by worldly wisdom, which is against Christ, until he recognizes the falsehood and decay of the wisdom of the world and the light and stability of the wisdom of Christ. Then, the holy apostle did not become angry with the world because they called him "a fool for Christ's sake" neither did he, in defiance of the world, hesitate to be called by this name.

It is not of any value to us how the world is going to regard or call us. However, it is important, and extremely important, how the holy angels in the heavens will regard and call us when, after death, we meet with them. This is of crucial importance and everything else is nothing.

Either we are fools for the world because of Christ or we are fools for Christ because of the world. O how short-lived is the sound of a word of the world! If the world would say to us "fool," the world will die and its word will die! What then is the value of its word? But if the heavenly, immortal ones say to us "fool," that will neither die nor is it removed from us as eternal condemnation.

Whoever does not believe in the Living God, nor in eternal life, nor in the Incarnation of the Lord Christ, nor in Christ's Resurrection nor in the truth of the Gospel nor in God's eternal mercy and justice - is it any wonder if he considers that one a fool who does believe in all of this?

O, may every one of us who cross ourselves with the Sign of the Cross not only find it easy to endure but with satisfaction receive the name **"fool"** for Christ's sake! Let us rejoice and be glad if the non-believers call us such, for that means that we are close to Christ and far away from the non-believers. Let us rejoice and be glad and repeat with a powerful echo in the ears of the world: yes, yes, indeed we are fools for Christ's sake!

O Lord Most-wise, strengthen us by Your power that we not fear the non-believing world neither when they lash us with whips nor when they insult us with words for Your sake.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 23 -

1. THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR POLYCARP, BISHOP OF SMYRNA

Polycarp, this great apostolic man, was born a pagan. St. John the Theologian converted him to the Faith of Christ and baptized him. In his childhood, Polycarp became an orphan and according to a vision in a dream Callista, a noble widow, took him as her own son, raised and educated him. From his childhood Polycarp was devout and compassionate. He strove to emulate the life of St. Bucolus, then the Bishop of Smyrna, as well as the holy Apostles John and Paul, whom he knew and heard. St. Bucolus ordained him a presbyter and before his death, Bucolus designated him as his successor in Smyrna. The apostolic bishops, who gathered at the funeral of Bucolus, consecrated Polycarp as bishop. From the very beginning, Polycarp was gifted with the power of working miracles. He expelled an evil spirit from the servant of a prince and through prayer stopped a terrible fire in Smyrna. Upon seeing this, many pagans regarded Polycarp as one of the gods. He brought down rain in times of drought, healed illnesses, discerned, prophesized and so forth. He suffered during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Three days before his death, St. Polycarp prophesized: "In three days, I will be burned in fire for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ!" And on the third day when the soldiers arrested him and brought him to trial, he cried out: "Let this be the will of the Lord my God." When the judge counseled him to deny Christ and to acknowledge the Roman gods, Polycarp said: "I cannot exchange the better for the worse!" The Jews especially hated Polycarp and endeavored to have Polycarp burned alive. When they placed him bound at the stake, he prayed to God for a long while. He was very old, grey and radiant as an angel. The people witnessed how the flame encircled him but did not touch him. Frightened by such a phenomenon, the pagan judges ordered the executioner to pierce him with a lance through the fire. When he was pierced, so much blood flowed from him that the entire fire was extinguished, and his body remained whole and unburned. At the persuasion of the Jews, the judge ordered Polycarp's lifeless body be incinerated according to the custom of the Hellenes. So the evil ones burned the dead body of the lifeless one whom they could not burn while alive. St. Polycarp suffered on Great and Holy Saturday in the year 167 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE DAMIAN

Damian, a monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenou on Mt. Athos, was a contemporary and companion of the great Cosmos of Zographou. He lived a life of asceticism on Mount Samareia between Esphigmenou and Hilendar. He died peacefully in the year 1280 A.D. When he died, a pleasant and sweet-smelling aroma emitted from his body for forty days.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT POLYCARP

His holy ones, God preserves
That until their appointed time, they do not perish,
Until they complete their task, they perish not.
The Elder Polycarp and saint of God
With his deacon, journeyed,
In a road inn, spent the night.
The Elder prays while the deacon sleeps.
Until an angel of God appeared to the Elder
And commanded that they immediately arise,
And from this road inn to depart,
For the inn is soon to be destroyed.
The young deacon, the Elder awakes,
But the deacon fatigued, slept on.
In that, the angel appeared again,
And again, the same warning gave,
Again, the Elder, his deacon awakes,
But, a heavy sleep, the deacon, overpowered
One moment he awakes, the next moment he is drowned in sleep.
And a third time, the angel appeared,
And a warning he issues for the third time.
That this was not a deceit, the Elder perceived,
But a warning from God, verily.
The saint jumped and the deacon he lifted,
And from the road inn, walked out.
And as soon as they walked out from the inn,
To the foundation, the entire house was destroyed,
All who were in it perished
Because of certain kinds of secret transgressions.
With fright, the young deacon was filled,
But in prayer, the saint was silent.
To the Most High God, they offered thanks,
They continued their way, under the stars.

REFLECTION

St. Polycarp writes the following to the Philippians about a priest Valentine who fell into the sin of avarice and secretly hid money belonging to the church: "I was deeply saddened because of Valentine who, at one time, was a presbyter among us, who had forgotten the rank [the priesthood] bestowed upon him. That is why I beg you, beware of greed and remain pure and just. Restrain yourself from every vice. He who cannot restrain himself, how will he be able to teach others restraint. He who submits to avarice pollutes himself with idolatry and numbers himself among the ranks of pagans. Who is not aware of God's judgement? As Paul teaches: **"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2)**. In other words, I have not noticed anything similar among you neither have I heard anything among you; among those whom Blessed Paul lived a life of asceticism and about whom he speaks with praise at the beginning of his Epistle to the Philippians. He boasts of you throughout the churches, which, at that time, knew God, and we did not yet know him, i.e., Polycarp and the inhabitants of Smyrna. Brethren, that is why I am very saddened because of Valentine and his wife. May God grant them true repentance. **"And you, be prudent in that and not count him as an enemy" (2 Thessalonians 3:15)**, but endeavor to correct them as suffering and prodigal members, that your entire body be sound. Acting thusly, you build yourselves up." Thus, the saints dealt with sinners: cautiously and compassionately; cautiously to prevent others from a similar sin and compassionately in order to correct and save sinners.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in conversation with the woman of Samaria (**St. John, Chapter 4**):

1. How at first, the mind of the woman was smothered completely by carnal sophistry;
2. How the meek Lord gradually leads her mind toward a loftier and spiritual reasoning;
3. How this encounter culminated in the conversion of many to Christ;
4. How the scattered seeds of the Lord, at first, seemingly decays in the physical mind, and how later it resurrects, grows, ripens and brings forth much spiritual fruit.

HOMILY

-About the works of Christ-

**"For the works which the Father has given Me to finish
-the very works that I do, bearwitness of Me, that the
Father has sent Me" (St. John 5:36).**

Brethren, what are those works of Christ? Those are the works of the **Householder** Who had returned from a journey and found the home robbed and desolate. Those are the works of the **Physician** Who entered into the most contaminated hospital and brought medicines and began to heal. Furthermore, those are the works of the **King** Who returned to his country and found it divided and ruined and his subjects as slaves in a strange land. Those are the works of the elder **Brother** who journeyed to a distant land to seek his younger brothers who, wandering and prodigal impoverished and became wild. Those are also the works of the Healer, Shepherd, Hero and Provider. Truly, these are not minor works! The average man with the greatest worldly knowledge, skill and courage would not be able to accomplish even in three-thousand years; those works which Christ completed in three years. Not only one man, but all men of all times, together, would not be able to complete the works of Christ for all eternity.

How did the Lord complete so many works? He completed them with the aid of five main miracles: **Humility, Words, Deed, Blood and Resurrection**. What do the works of Christ witness? **First**, the works witness that the earth did not send Him, but Heaven; **Second**, that an angel did not send Him, but the Heavenly Father Himself; **Third**, that, for such works no one is sufficient except Him Who is as great as God, Who is as wise as God, as almighty as is God, as merciful as God; Yes, Who Himself is equal to God.

O, how all of our works are insignificant compared to the works of Christ! With only one kernel of Christ's goodness and zeal, diligence and truthfulness can we complete our work perfectly. Grant us that kernel, O Lord Jesus, for we cannot either find this kernel on earth nor deserve it.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE FINDING OF THE HEAD OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

The great and glorious Baptist John was beheaded according to the wish and instigation of the wicked Herodias, the wife of Herod. When John was beheaded, Herodias ordered that his head not be buried with his body for she feared that this awesome prophet, somehow, would resurrect. Therefore, she took his head and buried it deep in the ground in a secluded and dishonorable place. Her maidservant was Johanna, the wife of Chuza a courtier of Herod. The good and devout Johanna could not tolerate that the head of the Man of God remain in this dishonorable place. Secretly she unearthed it, removed it to Jerusalem and buried it on the Mount of Olives. Not knowing of this, King Herod, when he learned of Jesus and how He worked great miracles, became frightened and said: **"This is John whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead" (St. Mark 16:16)**. After a considerable period of time, an eminent landowner believed in Christ, left his position and the vanity of the world and became a monk, taking the name, Innocent. As a monk, he took up abode on the Mount of Olives exactly in the place where the head of the Baptist was buried. Wanting to build himself a cell for himself, he dug deep and discovered an earthen vessel and in it a head, which was mysteriously revealed to him, to be the head of the Baptizer. He revered it and reburied it in the same spot. Later, according to God's Providence, this miracle-working relic [The head of St. John] traveled from place to place, sunk into the darkness of forgetfulness and again was rediscovered. Finally, during the reign of the pious Empress Theodora, the mother of Michael and the wife of Theophilus and at the time of Patriarch Ignatius it was translated to Constantinople. Many miraculous healings occurred from the relic of the Forerunner [Precursor]. It is important and interesting to note that while he was still alive, **"John did no miracles" (St. John 10:41)**, however, his relics have been endowed with miraculous power.

2. THE VENERABLE ERASMUS

Erasmus was a monk in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. He inherited great wealth from his parents and spent all on adoring churches, especially on silver-plating and gilding icons. When he had become impoverished and remained without anything, he was despised by all. The devil whispered to him that he squandered his estate in vain; instead of distributing his wealth among the poor, he gave it for the adornment of churches. Erasmus succumbed to this temptation and believed it for which he despised himself and fell into a state of despair and began to live aimlessly and lawlessly. When the hour of his death approached the brethren assembled around him and discussed his sins which he himself was not conscious of. All at once, he straightened up in bed and said: "Fathers and brothers, it is as you say; I am sinful and unrepentant, but behold St. Anthony and St. Theodosius appeared to me and after that, the All-Holy Mother of God told me that the Lord gave me more time for repentance." The Mother of God also spoke these encouraging words to him: "The poor you have with you in every place and my churches you do not." Erasmus lived for three more days, repented and fell asleep in the Lord. This teaches us that zeal for the Church and adornment of the churches is a task pleasing to God. St. Erasmus died in the year 1160 A.D.

HYMN PF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

To John, let us pray,
The Baptizer, glorious
Of the Savior, the trumpet,
Of the Creator, the servant,
By God, sent,
To help us
How he can.
To John, let us pray,
Awesome and holy,
Through him, so that,
God the Most High, would help us.
Help us O John
Wherever danger threatens!
The Faith to be preserved
O John, help us,
And for us to be bread
In all days and to the end,
That in every sheaf, we may see,
In every sheaf, the footstep of God!
When night falls, let it dawn
O John, help us,
Sinners, that we may repent,
Before the end, we reach
Before the Day of Judgment dawns
O John, help us(*)

(*) Traditional Serbian toast honoring St. John the Baptist.

REFLECTION

They are neither our good teachers nor our good friends who do everything for us according to our will. Venerable John Moschus writes about a prominent woman of a senatorial family who visited the Holy Land. Arriving in Caesarea, she decided to remain there and turned to the bishop with this request: "Give me a maiden to teach me the fear of God." The bishop introduced her to a humble virgin. After a period of time, the bishop met that woman and asked her: "How is the virgin to whom I introduced you?" "She is good," replied the woman, "but she is of little benefit to my soul because she is humble allows me to do my own will. For me it is required that she reproach me and not allow me to do whatever I want." The bishop then gave her another girl, of a very coarse character, who began to rebuke the woman, calling her a senseless rich woman and the like. After sometime, the bishop again asked the woman: "And that maiden, how does she conduct herself with you?" "She truly benefits my soul," replied the senator's wife. And so she became very meek. (**Excerpt from the Spiritual Meadow by John Moschus**)

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as a stumbling block:

1. For sinful self-conceit (vanity) i.e., for the perverted mind of mankind which thinks sensually and fleshy and opposes the mind of Christ;
2. For sinful self-love i.e., for the perverted heart of man which does not accept in itself neither the love of God nor the love of man;
3. For sinful self-will i.e., for the perverted will of man, which, as such, opposes the will of God.

HOMILY

-About repentance and the forgiveness of sins-

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name"(St. Luke 24:47).

This is the final instruction of the Savior to the holy apostles. In these words as in the shell of a walnut, is contained the gospel of reconciliation between God and men. What does God seek from men and what does God give them? He seeks repentance and He grants forgiveness of sins. He seeks little but He gives all. Let men only repent for committed sins and let men cease to sin and men will receive all from God; all; not only all that their hearts could desire rather even more, much more. In truth, to the righteous everything is promised. The righteous will be the inheritors of the Kingdom of God, they will be the sons of God, and they will be the children of light, the children of immortality, companions to the angels, brothers of Christ. The righteous will have an abundant life, an abundance of peace, an abundance of wisdom, an abundance of power and an abundance of joy. The righteous will have all, for all has been promised to them.

Let men only repent and they will receive all. Let the beggar only cleanse himself, bathe himself and clothe himself in purity before the doors of the royal court and he will be immediately ushered into the royal court and he will be met and embraced by the king and he will have all. He will live with the king, sit at the royal table; he will have all, all, all!

O my brethren, these are not only words rather this is the living and holy truth. For we know that many penitents, both female and male, received all of this, which was promised. Many have appeared from the other world and have proved the truth of these words, witnessing how they now live as royal sons and daughters. But they repented promptly; and there remains time for us to repent if we desire to be together with them as the heirs of the kingdom.

O Merciful Lord, help us that we may repent before death in order that we may live eternally.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 25 -

1. SAINT TARASIOUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

His predecessor, Patriarch Paul secretly, relinquished the throne, entered a monastery and received the Schema [The Great Angelic Habit]. Irene and Constantine reigned at the time. By Paul's counsel, Tarasius, a senator and royal advisor, was chosen as patriarch in the year 783 A.D. He was quickly elevated through the ecclesiastical ranks and became patriarch. A man of great learning and great zeal in the Orthodox Faith, Tarasius accepted this rank reluctantly in order to assist Orthodoxy in the struggle against heresies, especially against Iconoclasm. During his tenure, the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 783 A.D.] was convened, where Iconoclasm was condemned and the veneration of holy icons was confirmed and restored. Tarasius was very charitable toward orphans and the poor, creating for them shelters and distributed food to them. Toward the powerful, Tarasius was decisive in his defense of faith and morals. When Emperor Constantine banished Maria, his lawful wife and took a kinswoman and lived with her, and sought a blessing for marriage from the patriarch, Tarasius not only refused him a blessing, but first counseled him, after that reproached him, and finally forbid him to receive Holy Communion. Before his death, many saw how Tarasius replied to the demons saying: "I am not guilty of this sin! I am not guilty either of that sin!" Until his weakened tongue could no longer speak, he then began to defend himself with his hands driving away the demons. When he expired, his face lightened up as the sun. This truly great hierarch died in the year 806 A.D. He governed the Church for twenty-two years and four months.

2. THE VENERABLE PAPHNUTIUS OF KEPHALA

This great saint was a contemporary of St. Anthony the Great. It is said about him that he wore the same cassock for eighty years. St. Anthony greatly respected him and used to say that Paphnutius was a true ascetic who was able to come and to save souls.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TO GOD THE CREATOR

The Creator radiant, with light crowned,
By no one described, by nothing expressed,
The wise builders of the Church, he raises,
Zealous defenders and good shepherds.
He permits sufferings, because of our sins
Even though in essence, He is Mercy and Goodness.
Just as the unmalleable earth, with better frost He prepares,
Makes it malleable and for crops makes ready
In the same way our hearts He mellows with bitter sufferings
But by His tender hand leads all to good.
Through the darkness of sin, He gazes into the light,
And the darkness, after a designated time, He does not permit it to linger
He discerns joy, through sorrow and tears,
To the ends of every beginning, He sees the ends
For He began all, He wants to complete all
Who will oppose Him, when He commands?
One would say He is weak, for He adroitly conceals,
And with a shadow of a deed, He conceals and blocks the view of Himself
When the shadow passes and the world reaches its end,
And the Church prepared to heaven is lifted,
Then the Sun of Righteousness which never extinguishes
With the Church, as with porphyry, to cover Himself.

REFLECTION

A Christian is similar to betrothed maiden. As a betrothed maiden continually thinks about her betrothed, so does the Christian continually think about Christ. Even if the betrothed is far away beyond ten hills, it is all the same, the maiden behaves as though he is constantly there; by her and with her. She thinks about him, sings to him, talks about him, dreams about him and prepares gifts for him. In the same way a Christian behaves toward Christ. As the betrothed maiden knows that she first must leave and distance herself from the home where she was born in order to meet and totally unite with her betrothed, so the Christian knows that even he cannot totally unite with Christ until death separates him from the body, i.e., from the material home in which his soul, resided and grew from birth.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus sitting in the boat, teaching the people on the shore: **"On another occasion He began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around Him so that He got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land" (St. Mark 4:1).**

1. How a great multitude of people crowded around to hear Him so that He had to enter the boat;
2. How, in parables He taught them about the sower, the seed and the ground i.e., those comparisons and examples, which from day in and day out, are repeated from the beginning of the world and will be repeated until the end of the world;
3. How He does not teach them with the aid of some rare and unusual events rather by the help of those simple events, which along with man entered into time and together with man, will exit time.

HOMILY

-About the impossibility of secrets-

"For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed"(St. Mark 4:22).

All secret works of man will be revealed one day. None of man's works can be hidden. The Jews thought they could hide the slaying of so many prophets from God and that their bloody, nefarious deed against Christ would be able to be hidden from God and man. However, that which they thought to hide became a daily and nightly tale both in the heavens and on earth for thousands of years.

Judas thought to hide his traitorous agreement against his Lord, but the Lord discerned this agreement and declared it to his face. **"Jesus said to him, `Judas are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' " (St. Luke 22:48).**

The Lord also discerned the hearts of the **Pharisees** and read their evil thoughts. **"Why do you think evil in your hearts?" (St. Matthew 9:4).** What kind of works, what kind of things, what kind of events in this world can be hidden from Him Who sees and reveals even the most secret thoughts of the hearts of men?

"For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed." Because of this we need to be fearful; because of this we need to be rejoiceful. To be fearful - for all of our secret evil deeds, evil desires and evil thoughts will be brought out in the open. To be rejoiceful - for all the good, which we have committed, or desired or thought in secret, will be brought out in the open. If it is not brought out before men in the open, it will be brought out before the heavenly angels. The greater the fear for sinners, so much greater the joy for the righteous.

O Lord, Lover of mankind, forgive us our sins and do not make them known to our destruction and to the sorrow of Your holy angels.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 26 -

1. SAINT PORPHYRIUS, BISHOP OF GAZA

This great Arch-shepherd was born of wealthy parents in Thessalonica. From his youth, until age twenty-five, Porphyrius remained in Thessalonica, the town of his birth. After that, he took leave of his parents and worldly life and withdrew to the wilderness of Egypt. Under the guidance of an experienced spiritual father, the young Porphyrius was tonsured a monk and remained there for five years. He then visited the Holy Land in the company of the monk Mark, his faithful companion. In the proximity of Jerusalem, he lived an ascetical life in a cave, again for five years. But then the legs of Porphyrius became weak and he was unable to walk. Nevertheless, crawling on his knees, he continually attended the Divine Services of God. One night, our Lord appeared to him of a vision and cured him of the infirmity in his legs and he became completely whole. When he was elected Bishop of Gaza, Porphyrius accepted this obligation with a heavy heart. In Gaza, he found only two-hundred eighty Christians. All other inhabitants were very fanatical idolaters. Only by his great faith and patience did Porphyrius succeed to convert the inhabitants of Gaza to the Faith of Christ. He personally traveled to Constantinople to see Emperor Arcadius and Patriarch John Chrysostom to seek their support in this unequal struggle with the idolaters. He received the desired support. The idolatrous temples were closed and the idols destroyed and he built a beautiful church with thirty marble columns. Empress Eudoxia especially assisted in the building of this church. Porphyrius lived long enough to see the entire town of Gaza converted to the Christian Faith, but only after his many efforts, sufferings and prayerful tears to god. He died peacefully in the year 421 A.D. He was a miracle-worker both during his life and after his death. Even today, his relics repose in Gaza.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR JOHN, THE BUILDER [KALPHA]

This saint was born in Galata in Constantinople. By occupation he was an architect, a builder [Kalpha: builder in Greek]. Because of his ardent confession of the Christian Faith, John offended the Turks and they began to pressure him to become a Muslim. "I will not deny my Sweet Jesus Christ," John bravely replied. "In Him I believe; Him I serve; Him, I confess." Following grave tortures, the Turks beheaded him on February 26, 1575 A.D. in Constantinople. He suffered honorably for his beloved Christ and took up habitation in the mansions of the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PORPHYRIUS THE PARALYTIC

The monk Mark asks Porphyrius:

**You were paralytic, holy father,
On your knees, to church you crawled,
My hand in yours, you held
Yesterday thus and today otherwise!
At night you were ill, behold healthy you dawned
So suddenly, who healed you?
Of the rare physician, tell me the name-
To Mark, Porphyrius replied:
My Healer, my Creator is,
Last night on Golgotha, I fell asleep
By severe pain, completely overpowered,
As though in person, I saw clearly in a dream
On the Cross, my Lord hanging,
And on the other cross, the thief.
As I saw, so I cried out!
O God and Lord, remember me,
In Your kingdom, remember me!
The Good Lord, to the thief said:
Go down and his body heal,
As your soul, I healed.
Quickly the thief, the cross descended,
Embraced me, kissed me, and raised me up:
Saying: To our Savior, draw near!
At that moment, the Lord also descended the Cross,
Lifted the Cross and, on me He placed it.
Receive the holy wood, He said,
And for the sake of eternal salvation, carry it.
As soon as I, with my hands, grabbed the Cross,
Immediately stood and was immediately made whole.
To God my Creator, glory be,
To Christ my Savior, glory be!**

REFLECTION

St. John Chrysostom writes thusly against those who, in church create a disturbance in church and who depart from church before the completion of the Divine Liturgical Service of God. "Some do not approach Holy Communion with trembling but with commotion, shoving one another, burning with anger, hollering, scolding, pushing their neighbor, full of disturbance. About this, I have often spoken and will not cease to speak about this. Do you not see the order of behavior at the pagan Olympic games when the Arranger passes through the arena with a wreath on his head, dressed in a lengthy garment, holding a staff in his hand and the Crier declares that there be silence and order? Is it not obscene that there, where the devil reigns there is such silence, and here where Christ invites us to Himself there is such an uproar. At the arena, silence: and in church, uproar! On the sea, calm and in the harbor, tempest! When you are invited to a meal, you must not leave before the others, even though you are satisfied before the others, and here while the awesome mystery of Christ is being celebrated, while the priestly functions are still continuing, you leave in the middle of it and exit? How can this be forgiven? How can this be justified? Judas, after receiving Communion at the Last Supper [Mystical Supper] that final night, departed quickly while the others remained at the table. Behold, whose example do they follow who hurry to depart before the final thanksgiving? **(Homily on the Feast of the Epiphany).**

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in the boat with His disciples: **"And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves. But He was asleep" (St. Matthew 8:24).**

1. How a tempest arose while the Lord slept;
2. How the frightened disciples awakened Him and sought His help;
3. How the Lord rebuked the disciples because of little faith and calmed the sea and the winds;
4. How I need not be afraid of any tempest in life if I keep the Lord in my heart as on the stern of the boat. (the body - the boat - the heart - the stern).

HOMILY

-About internal charity-

"But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you" (St. Luke 11:41).

External cleanliness becomes a man. But that is a lesser cleanliness. Internal cleanliness is incomparably more important than external cleanliness. That is greater cleanliness. A dish can serve more usefully only if it is washed and clean on the inside even though the outside is dark and ashy. If a glass is dirty on the inside, its external cleanliness will never attract anyone to drink from it. If a bowl is dark and ashy on the outside who will dare to eat from it? There are many more teachers in the world and many examples of external rather than internal cleanliness. For it is easier to teach and show by example external cleanliness rather than internal cleanliness.

Behold brethren, how the Teacher and Model of great cleanliness, places this great cleanliness on the dependence of internal alms-giving. Alms-giving, which is performed from the heart, purifies the soul of man. Alms-giving, which is performed from the heart, cleanses the heart of man. Alms-giving, which is performed from the soul, cleanses a man's soul. Alms-giving, which is performed from his entire mind, cleanses the mind of a man. In a word, internal alms-giving cleanses the entire man. If alms-giving is only from a hand, it does not cleanse the hand much less the heart, soul and mind. Alms-giving from the hand is indispensable but it cleanses the giver only then, when the heart moves the hand to alms-giving. Besides alms-giving from the hand, there exist other types of alms-giving. Prayer for people is internal alms-giving and, likewise, sorrow for human pains, and joy in the joy of others. That is alms-giving, which proceeds from the heart and creates cleanliness in the heart, the soul and the mind.

O, All-Pure Lord, help us that, with true alms-giving we acquire great cleanliness.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

FEBRUARY - 27 -

1. THE VENERABLE PROCOPIUS - DECAPOLIT

This saint was from Decapolis [Ten Cities] surrounding the Sea of Galilea for which he was called "Decapolit." In his youth, he devoted himself to a life of asceticism and accomplished all prescribed efforts, by which the heart is purified and the spirit elevated to God. When a persecution began by the nefarious Emperor Leo Isaurian regarding icons, Procopius rose up in defense of icons showing that the veneration of icons is not idolatry; for Christians know that honoring icons they do not either bow down or honor lifeless material but rather honor living saints who are depicted on the icons. Because of that, Procopius was arrested, brutally tortured, flogged and scrapped with an iron brush. When the wicked Emperor Leo was slain in the body, [for he had lost his soul earlier], icons were restored in the churches and Procopius returned to his monastery where he spent the remainder of his days in peace. In old age, he was translated into the kingdom of God where he gazes with joy upon the living angels and saints, whose images on icons he honored on earth. He died peacefully in the ninth century.

2. THE VENERABLE THALELAEUS

Thalelaeus was a Syrian ascetic. At first he resided in the Monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified near Jerusalem but later he settled in a pagan cemetery known for the apparitions of evil spirits and frightening things. In order to conquer fear within himself through faith in God, Thalelaeus settled in this cemetery where he lived for many years enduring many assaults from evil spirits both day and night. Because of his great faith and love for God, God endowed him with the gift of working miracles by which he did much good for the sick and suffering people. He died about the year 460 A.D.

3. VENERABLE TITUS OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Titus was a presbyter and had a sincere Christian love for Deacon Evgarius as a brother for a brother. As much as their love in the beginning was true, later it became a mutual blood-feud and hatred sown by the devil. They hated each other so much that when one was censuring in the church, the other turned around and walked out of the church. Titus attempted many times to reconcile with his opponent but in vain. Titus became ill and everyone thought that he was going to die. He begged them to bring Evgarius to him in order to forgive him. Forcefully, they dragged Evgarius to the bedside of Titus, but Evgarius broke free and fled saying that he will not forgive Titus either in this world or the other world. As soon as he said this, he fell to the ground and died. Titus arose from his bed healthy and related how the demons were hovering around him until he forgave Evgarius and when he forgave him, the demons fled and attached Evgarius and angels of God surrounded Titus. He died in the year 1190 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE STEPHEN

At first, Stephen was a palace clerk of Emperor Maurice. After that he resigned his palace duties and, driven by love for Christ, Stephen built a hospice of charity for the aged in Constantinople. He died peacefully in the year 614 A.D.

5. THE HOLY MARTYR JULIAN

Julian suffered severely from gout so much so that he was neither able to stand nor walk. Because of his faith in Christ, he was brought on a pallet before the judge. He was burned alive at the stake in Alexandria with his disciple Cronyon during the reign of Emperor Decius.

HYMN OF PRAISE

FORGIVNESS

That God forgives us, let us forgive men,
As temporary guests, we are on this earth.
Prolonged fasting and prayer, in vain is
Without forgiveness and without true mercy.
God is the true Physician; sins are leprosy,
Whoever God cleanses, God also glorifies.
God rewards with mercy, every mercy of men,
That one perishes without mercy, who returns sin with sin,
With pus from pus - infected wounds, pus is not cleansed,
Neither is darkness from the dungeon dispelled by darkness,
But pure balm heals the wound of pus,
But the darkness of the dungeon, a light disperses.
To the seriously wounded, mercy is like a balm,
As a torch, in her [mercy] everyone rejoices.
This the ignorant says: I have no need of mercy!
But, when he is overcome by misery, he cries out for mercy!
Men bathe upon the mercy of God,
That mercy of God awakes us to life!
That God forgives us, let us forgive men,
As temporary guests, we are all on this earth.

REFLECTION

Whenever we are outside the Grace of God, we are outside of ourselves and, compared with our Grace-filled nature, we do not find ourselves in a better condition than an insane man in comparison to a so-called healthy man. Only a blessed man is a natural man, i.e., a man of higher and unspoiled nature, in which the Grace of God rules and governs. St. Simeon the New Theologian says: **"A lamp, even if it is filled with oil and possesses a wick, remains totally dark if it is not lighted with fire. So it is with the soul in appearance adorned with all virtues, if it does not have a light and the Grace of the Holy Spirit it, is extinguished and dark."** (Homily, Number 59). As the great apostle also says: **"But by the Grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10)**. However to be without grace means to be alienated from God and alienated from the reality of our own individual being. Our being, our personality, confirms our reality and receives its fullness only in the nearness of God and by God. That is why we must look at sinners as we look upon the sick: as weak shadows, without reality and without a mind.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Vine **"I am the true Vine" (St. John 15:1)**:

1. As the Vine from which sprouted numerous fruitful branches in the images of the saints;
2. As the Vine Who with His sap, His blood, waters and feeds all the branches on Himself;
3. As the Vine from Whom the Divine Church branched out on earth and in the heavens;
4. As the Vine from Whom, even I should not separate the branch of my life.

HOMILY

-About the power of the Resurrector of the body-

"Destroy this temple, an in three days I will raiseit up" (St. John 2:19).

Here our Lord speaks about the temple of His body. Destroy this body and in three days I will raise it up! Thus speaks One Who knows His might and Who, according to His might, fulfilled His words. For His body was destroyed, broken, pierced, buried and covered with darkness for three days. And the third day, He raised it; raised it not only from the grave on earth but raised it up to the heavens. And so, He spoke the word and His word came true.

The Lord gave a sign to the Jews, for they sought a sign from Him. And when He gave them a sign, such as no one else before Him was able to give, they did not believe Him but, confused and frightened, bribed the guards from Golgotha to swear falsely and to proclaim the lie that this miraculous sign did not occur, but that His disciples stole His body from the tomb!

No sign whatsoever helps those do not want to believe. The Jews, with their own eyes witnessed the many miracles of Christ, but nevertheless did not want to believe but, they spoke about justifying their unbelief saying that He performs these miracles **"by the help of the prince of the demons!" (St. Matthew 9:34)**. Whoever does not want to believe in good, all the signs which heaven can give will not help him. A heart filled with evil is harder than granite. A mind, darkened by sin, cannot be illuminated by all the light of heaven, whose light is greater than one-thousand suns.

When man expels evil from his heart and saves his mind from the darkness of sin, then he sees the numerous signs which God gives to those who want to believe - to see and to believe.

O, my brethren, let us not sin against the mercy of God and let us not succumb to the evil of the Jews. O, my brethren, all the signs have already been given, and they all glitter as the stars in the heavenly firmament, to all who have a good heart and a right-thinking mind.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR PROTERIUS

This saint was a presbyter in Alexandria at the same time when Dioscorus the heretic was patriarch of Alexandria. Dioscorus was one of the leaders of the Monophysite heresy, which taught that there was one nature in Christ [Human] and not two natures [Human and Divine]. Marcian and Plucheria also reigned at that time as emperor and empress. This holy and devout man Proterius stood up against Dioscorus for which he endured many miseries. Then the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon, 451 A.D.] was convened at which the Monophysite heresy was condemned, Dioscorus removed from the patriarchal throne and banished into exile. Proterius, this true-believing man, was elected in his place. He governed the Church with zeal and love; a true follower of Christ. However, the followers of Dioscorus did not cease to create a disturbance in Alexandria. At the time of one such bloody disturbance, Proterius left the city with the intention of staying away temporarily. Along the way, the Prophet Isaiah appeared to him in a vision and said: "Return to the city, I am waiting to take you." Proterius returned to Alexandria and entered the church. Upon hearing about this, the enraged heretics rushed into the church, seized the patriarch and stabbed him throughout with knives. Six other Christians were also slain with Proterius. Thus, Proterius this wonderful shepherd of Christ's flock, received the martyr's wreath for the truth of Orthodoxy in the year 457 A.D.

2. SAINT BASIL THE CONFESSOR

Basil was a companion and co-suffer with St. Procopius Decapolit. Basil faithfully followed his teacher Procopius both in peaceful times and in time of persecution. He suffered many hardships from the iconoclasts and when the iconoclasts were defeated, Basil according to God's Providence, returned together with Procopius to his monastery where in fasting and prayer he lived a long life of asceticism. He died peacefully in the year 747 A.D.

3. THE PRIEST-MARTYR NESTOR

Nestor was the bishop of Magydos in Pamphylia. He was distinguished by his great meekness. During the reign of Decius, he was brought to trial and cruelly tortured for Christ. Before his death, he saw in a vision, a sacrificial lamb, which he interpreted as a sign of his impending sacrifice. He was tortured by the Eparch [governor] Publius and in the end was crucified in Perga, the capital of the province, in the year 250 A.D.

4. BLESSED NICHOLAS, FOOL FOR CHRIST FROM PSKOV

Nicholas lived as a "fool for Christ" in the town of Pskov during the reign of Tsar Ivan the Terrible and died on February 28, 1576 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TWO NATURES

Two natures, the Lord united,
That He does not separate them anymore:
Human and Divine,
That He does not separate them anymore:
God and Man - One Person
In both respects; undiminished
The God-Man and Savior,
That which is separated - the Unifier,
Interpreter of the eternal mysteries,
Founder of the kingdom of the saints,
To man, God came closer,
Time uplifted, eternity descended
Of the Holy Trinity, Christ the trumpet
Of the Two Natures, Christ the mystery:
The true God became man,
Remained up and descends down,
Neither did He fall or stumble,
But in flesh wrapped Himself.
That is holy, pure love,
Love eternal, eternally the same:
A giant He raised, with His small finger,
And incomprehensible to the mind, it is.

REFLECTION

"Fools for Christ" were distinguished by rare fearlessness. Blessed Nicholas ran throughout the streets of Pskov pretending insanity rebuking the people for their hidden sins and prophesying that which will befall them. When Ivan the Terrible entered Pskov, the entire town was in fear and terror of the Terrible Tsar. As a welcome to the Tsar, bread and salt was placed in front of every home but the people did not appear. When the mayor of the town presented the Tsar with bread and salt on a tray before the church, the Tsar pushed the tray away and the bread and salt fell to the ground. At that time, Blessed Nicholas appeared before the Tsar in a long shirt tied with a rope, hopping around on a cane as a child and then cried out: "Ivanuska, Ivanuska, eat bread and salt and not human blood." The soldiers rushed out to catch him but he fled and hid. The Tsar learning about this Blessed Nicholas, who and what he is, visited him in his scant living quarters. It was the first week of the Honorable Fast [The First Week of Lent]. Upon hearing that the Tsar was coming to visit him, Nicholas found a piece of raw meat and when the Tsar entered his living quarters, he bowed and offered the meat to the Tsar. "Eat Ivanusha, eat!" Angrily, the Terrible Tsar replied: "I am a Christian and I do not eat meat during the Fast Season." Then the man of God quickly responded to him: "But you do even worse: you feed on men's flesh and blood, forgetting not only Lent but also God!" This lesson entered profoundly into the heart of Tsar Ivan and he, ashamed, immediately departed Pskov where he had intended to perpetrate a great massacre.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Bread of Life: "I am the Bread of Life" (St. John 6:48).

1. As the Bread by which the soul is nourished and lives;
2. As the Bread by which the mind is nourished and enlightened;
3. As the Bread by which the heart is nourished and ennobled.

HOMILY

-About the nourishment of the soul-

"I am the Bread of Life" (St. John 6:48).

Thus spoke the Lord Jesus to the hungry generation of man. This word was realized throughout the centuries to the numerous followers of Christ who received the Lord as the nourishment of their souls. A desperate young man who was close to suicide confessed to a spiritual father. The spiritual father listened to him carefully and said to him: "My son, you are to blame for your misfortune. Your soul is starved to death. Throughout your entire life, you learned only how to nourish your body but you never thought that the soul requires nourishment; greater and more often than that which the body needs. Your soul is at the point of death from hunger. My son, partake of and drink Christ [Holy Communion]. Only that can restore your soul from death. Daily and continually partake and drink of Christ. He is the Life-creating Bread of our souls." The young man listened to the elder and returned to life.

Brethren, let us nourish our soul with Christ so that our soul may be alive and healthy. Let us continually nourish our mind with Christ's thoughts so that our mind might be enlightened and clear. Let us continually nourish our heart with the love of Christ so that our heart might be full and joyful. Let us continually nourish our will with the commandments of Christ and the example of Christ so that our will, every minute, might perform good deeds. Let Christ's thoughts be our thoughts and Christ's love our love and Christ's good will our good will. Let us continually nourish our souls with Christ the Lord; with our soul let us continually partake of Him and drink Him! There is no more nourishing Bread than He; there is no sweeter drink than He. In Holy Communion, He gives Himself completely to us: Body and Blood. But, Holy Communion is a warning that our souls must continually be nourished by Him; continually partake of Him and drink of Him just as we continually breathe.

O, our God and Sweet Lord, stir our souls that they be continually nourished by You and remain alive. You are our Bread of Life.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE JOHN CASSIAN

John, this great spiritual man, was born in Rome of renowned parents. In his youth he studied all the secular sciences, especially philosophy and astronomy. After that, he devoted himself completely to the study of Holy Scripture. Striving from good to better and desiring even higher levels of perfection, Cassian traveled from Rome to Constantinople to personally hear and see St. John Chrysostom. Chrysostom instructed him and ordained him a deacon. Benefiting much from the wise Chrysostom, Cassian traveled farther east, to learn even more and become more perfected. He remained in Egypt, the longest time in Nitria, among the famous spiritual athletes from whom he learned the art of every virtue. He finally returned to the west and settled in the town of Marseilles [French Seaport]. Here he established two monastic communities: one for men and one for women. At the request of the monks, Cassian wrote many essays which are especially beneficial for the lovers of the spiritual life: "Eight Books on the struggle against the eight principle passions" [**Institutes of the Monastic Life and Conferences on the Egyptian Monks**]. Of great importance is his essay against the heretic Nestorius. This essay was written at the request of Archdeacon Leo. He served our Lord faithfully and enriched many with his wisdom and took up habitation in eternal life in the year 435 A.D. The relics of St. Cassian repose in Marseilles [France] even today.

2. THE VENERABLE BARSANUPHIUS

Barsanuphius was born a pagan in Palestine and was baptized in his eighteenth year and immediately was tonsured a monk taking the name of John. When he became known for of his virtuous life, Barsanuphius was elected archbishop of Damascus. He did not remain long at this position. Yearning for the reclusive, ascetically spiritual life, he secretly left Damascus and went to the wilderness of Nitria. Here, he presented himself as the monk Barsanuphius and immediately, was assigned, as an obedience, to be a water-carrier for the monastery. The former archbishop accepts this obedience with joy. With his wise reflections, meekness and diligence, Barsanuphius soon became a model example to all the monks. Only before his death was it revealed to the monks who this Barsanuphius was. Thus this saint, by his example, served as a reproach to the proud and power-loving and as a comfort to the humble and meek. He died peacefully and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 457 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT CASSIAN ON PASSIONS

Cassian numbered eight terrible passions

And still the ninth - impure thoughts.

In food and drink, Gluttony the first,

To the spirit and body, Promiscuity the second,

Avarice, shackles which tie one to the metal,

Anger, of man's heart the frost which freezes and constricts.

Melancholy, which erodes the soul; the insatiable worm,

Slothfulness, drowsiness to a soul, which spins [weaves] death,

Vanity, a serpent; a many headed serpent,

It is everywhere and nowhere, the grass conceals it,

Pride, a double-edged sword that cuts and hems,

Both the young and old mercilessly destroys,

And the ones vigorous, and arrogant [proud] because of strength,

And the spiritual elders, to themselves, dear.

Of all these passions, our defense God is

By the prayers of the holy Saint Cassian.

REFLECTION

St. John Cassian writes of the struggle with the spirit of lust in this manner: "Struggle with the spirit of lust is a bitter struggle; longer than other struggles; a daily struggle victoriously accomplished completely only by a small number of people. This struggle begins with the first mature growth and does not cease until all other passions are defeated. In this struggle, a two-fold weapon is necessary. For the achievement of this perfect and pure chastity bodily fasting alone is not sufficient (although fasting, before everything else is necessary): along with this, meekness of the spirit and unremitting prayer is necessary against this most impure spirit [lust]. After that, continual study of Holy Scripture together with prudent mental exercises and after that physical labor and handiworks, all of which keeps the heart from lusting and restores it to itself and, above all, profound and true humility without which victory over any passion can never be achieved. Victory over this passion [lust] is conditioned with the perfect purification of the heart from which, according to the words of the Lord, flows the poison of this sickness [lust]. **"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (St. Matthew 15:19).** One must have stable humility and patience in the heart as well as careful protection of oneself from anger and other passions during the course of the day. For in as much as the fire of anger enters in us, afterward so much easier, does the ember of passions penetrate us. It is interesting that even many other great spiritual fathers bring into causal tie the passion of anger and the passion of lustful desire from which follows, that the most angry ones are the most lustful ones.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the vigilant Watchman over His Church: **"Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (St. Matthew 28:20).**

1. How He watches over the entire created world and especially His Church acquired by His Blood;
2. How He watches over every baptized soul as a gardener over His planting;
3. How He through serenity and through tempest, leads His Church, leading her [The Church] to ultimate victory;
4. How He watches even over my life, that it grow and that it may be built in His eternal kingdom.

HOMILY

-About the living presence of Christ-

"I am with You always, even to the end of the ages" (St. Matthew 28:20).

Here is consolation above consolations!

Here is consolation for those whom the tempest breaks! Let them only remember: There Christ is beside them and let them not be afraid. **He is the Helmsman.**

Here is consolation for those who are sick! Let them know that Christ is there beside their bed and let them not despair. **He is the Physician.**

Here is consolation for those who grow old! Let them not lose sight that Christ travels with them through time to all eternity, into eternal youth and let them be at peace.

Here is consolation for those who are tormented by men! Let them not think that they are abandoned, for Christ is with them in all suffering; at judgment and in prison and let them rejoice. **He is the Judge.**

Here is consolation for those who are disturbed by evil spirits! Let them remember that Christ is the conqueror over evil spirits, He is on their side and let them be strengthened. **He is the Victor.**

Here is consolation for all who seek the light of justice and truth! Let them believe that Christ is closer to their soul than their eyes and let them adhere to His leadership. **He is Light.**

O, my brethren, in truth, Christ is constantly with us as light is constantly with the eyes, which see. But O, our sorrow if the eyes of our soul are closed and, in vain does the light labor to encounter the pupil of our vision! O, our sorrow and grief when we are not with Christ!

He goes out to meet us. Are we going out to meet Him? He wants to be with us. Do we want to be with Him? If we want consolation, we must be with Him all days to the end of our time.

O Lord, our only consolation, do not leave us!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH

MARCH - 1 -

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYR EUDOCIA

The venerable martyr Eudocia lived in the Phoenician city of Heliopolis during the reign of Trajan. Eudocia was a great debaucher at first. After that she was a penitent, ascetic, and finally a martyr. Through her debauchery she amassed a great fortune. The change in her life came about inadvertently through God's Providence and a certain elder, the monk Herman. Coming into the city on assignment, he resided at the home of a Christian whose house was adjacent to that of Eudocia. In the evening and according to monastic tradition, he began to recite the Psalter and to read a chapter on the dreadful judgment. Eudocia heard him and attentively eavesdropped on his words to the end. Fear and terror overcame her, and she remained awake until dawn. At daybreak, she sent her servant to beseech the monk to come to her. Herman came and a lengthy conversation took place between them about faith and salvation in general. As a result of the conversation, Eudocia petitioned the local bishop to baptize her. Following her baptism, Eudocia bequeathed her entire estate to the Church to be distributed among the poor. She dismissed her servants and slaves and withdrew to a convent. Thus, Eudocia resolved to dedicate herself to the monastic life, obedience, patience, long vigils, prayer and fasting. After thirteen months, Eudocia was elected abbess. Eudocia lived in the convent for fifty-six years and was found worthy before God. He endowed her with much grace so that she raised even the dead. When the persecution of Christians began under Prince Vincent, St. Eudocia was beheaded. Eudocia is a glorious example of how a vessel of impurity can be purified, sanctified and filled with the Grace of the Holy Spirit, the precious odor of heaven.

2. THE VENERABLE AGAPIUS

He was a novice under the spiritual direction of a priest in the Vatopedi Monastery on Mt. Athos. Captured by pirates, Agapius was sold as a slave in Magnesia. After twelve years, he was miraculously freed through the help of the All-Holy Mother of God and returned to Vatopedi. He baptized his former master and became his spiritual father. Agapius continued the remainder of his life in asceticism in Vatopedi and died peacefully in the Lord.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR, ANTONINA

Antonina was born in Nicaea. Because of her faith in Christ, she was arrested and brutally tortured. Finally, she was sewn in a sack and drowned in a lake in the year 302 A.D. God saved her soul and continuously glorified her among the angels in heaven and among the faithful on earth.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EUDOCIA

At one time, a woman filled with sin,
And finally, a meek penitent,
Eudocia prayed to God,
All the while kneeling, shedding tears.
This enkindled the rage of Satan,
And enraged, to the heavens he cried out:
O Michael, heavenly commander,
Justice you speak, injustice you do to me,
My sheepfold you intend to empty completely,
And from me, to seize the last sheep.
Why do you take this sinful woman?
Her sins are greater than mine!
For some minor disobedience,
To Hades I fell and, into eternal torments.
Her sins are as the stagnant sea
Encompassing everything that comes near her.
Thus, malice spites at good,
To every penitent it bodes evil,
While Michael, the guardian of the penitent,
With angels approach Eudocia
And takes her under his protection,
By his breath, he dispelled the demons.
At that moment from heaven a song echoed:
The mercy of God so willed,
That every penitent be embraced,
That every penitent be forgiven,
Repentance--for all mankind, salvation,
That is both God's mercy and will--
God's will--Satan's evil will.

REFLECTION

Faithfulness and obedience to the will of God is necessary to adorn the life of every Christian. As is seen in the life of St. Agapius, God glorifies the faithful and the obedient. When he was a young man, this saint was captured by pirates, was taken to Asia and was sold to a certain Arab. For twelve years Agapius remained quietly and obediently a slave of this Arab. For twelve years he prayed to the All-Holy Mother of God to help him gain his freedom from bondage. One night, the Virgin Mother of God appeared to him and said, "Arise and go without fear to Mt. Athos to your elder." Agapius arose and came to his elder on Mt. Athos, the Holy Mountain. When the elder saw Agapius, he was saddened, thinking that Agapius had fled from his master. He said to him, "My child Agapius, you have deceived your master, but you can never deceive God. On the day of the dreadful judgment, you will have to render an answer for that money with which your master purchased you to serve him. Therefore, you must return and faithfully serve your master." Agapius, faithful and obedient to the will of God, returned immediately to Asia, reported to his master, and informed him about everything that had happened. The Arab, learning all of this, was amazed and was overcome with the charity of Christians. He desired to see Agapius' s elder. The Arab arrived at the Holy Mountain, accompanied by his two sons. Here, he and his two sons were baptized. All three of them were tonsured as monks. They remained there until their deaths, practicing the strict life of asceticism, at first, under the guidance of Agapius' s spiritual father, and afterwards, by Agapius himself. Thus, the one-time cruel masters became the obedient disciples of their former slave, faithful to the will of the God of the obedient Agapius.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus at the Mystical Supper:

1. How He washes the feet of His disciples. By this act He especially teaches humility and love for one another;
2. How Peter, one of the most faithful, was ashamed and refused to allow our Lord to wash his feet;
3. How Judas, unbeliever and traitor, was unashamed and did not refuse our Lord to wash his feet;
4. How even today, the faithful receive countless benefits from God with embarrassment and shame, and the unfaithful also receive the same but without embarrassment and without shame, and yet with grumbling against God.

HOMILY

-About knowing and doing-

"If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it" (St. John 13:17).

The most important aspect of this scripture text of our Lord, brethren, is that the Lord does not mitigate knowing, but stresses doing. He does not say to the apostles, **"Blessed are you when you know this."** Some pagan teachers who viewed salvation only in terms of knowledge spoke in this manner. However, our Lord says, "Blessed are you if you do it." The knowledge of salvation was given to us by the Lord Jesus Himself, and no one is able to attain that knowledge through his own efforts.

Some of the ancient Greek philosophers said that mankind cannot come to the knowledge of the truth, nor can be saved, until God Himself comes to earth. Our Lord came among men and revealed this knowledge to them. Whosoever receives this knowledge also accepts the obligation to fulfill it. O, how much easier will it be at the judgment for those who never received this knowledge at all, and consequently, did not fulfill it, than for those who received this knowledge and neglected to fulfill it.

O, how much easier it will be at the judgment for unlearned pagans than for the learned Christians.

Our Lord alone showed Himself not only as a Knower, but also as a Doer. His perfect knowledge complimented His perfect doing. Before the eyes of His disciples, He personally fulfilled all of His own commandments. He gave them this commandment and completed this act of humility and love when He washed the feet of His disciples. He then commanded that they should do this to one another. Our Lord did not dwell among men to soil men, but to wash them. He never soiled anyone, but cleansed all who wished to be cleansed. What kind of shame is it for many of us who labor much to wash ourselves and labor twice as much to soil others? O, my brethren, we muddy our own blood brothers. Even Christ weeps when He sees how we, with the mud of slander, soil those whom He has washed with His own blood.

O Lord forgive us! We sin everyday against our own brothers. Make our brothers, O Lord, whom we have soiled, brighter than we in Your kingdom. You are just and You see all.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 2 -

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR THEODOTUS, BISHOP OF KYRENIA ON THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS

Because of his wisdom and kindness, Theodotus was elected to the episcopacy and governed the Church of God with love and zeal. When the persecution of Christians began during the reign of the wicked Emperor Licinius, this godly man was brought to trial and put through many tortures. When the torturer Sabinus advised him to deny Christ and to bow down before pagan idols and to worship them, Theodotus replied, "If you knew the goodness of my God in Whom I hope, that because of these temporary sufferings, will make me worthy of eternal life, you also would wish to suffer in the same manner as I." The torturers began to strike his body with nails, and he prayed to God with gratitude. Thinking his end was near, Theodotus counseled and taught the Christians who were assembled around him. By the Providence of God, the Emperor Constantine at that time proclaimed freedom to Christians and ordered that all who were sentenced be released for the sake of Christ. And so, this saint was freed and returned to his prior position in Kyrenia. Astortured as he was, Theodotus lived for several more years. After that, he found repose in the Lord, Whom he faithfully served and for Whom he suffered. In the year 302 A.D. his earthly life ended and was translated to the mansions of our Lord.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR TROADIUS

As a young man he suffered for Christ. Gregory of Neo-Caesarea saw in a vision how bravely Troadius withstood his tortures for Christ until the time he was killed. He saw his soul, which was separated from the body, joyfully hurrying toward heaven. St. Troadius suffered and was glorified in the third century.

3. THE FOUR-HUNDRED AND FORTY MARTYRS

They were killed by the Lombards in Italy about the year 579 A.D. St. Gregory Dialogues writes about them. In one place, forty of them were beheaded. At another place, four-hundred of them were also beheaded, all because they refused to eat of the sacrifices of the idols. Additionally, these four-hundred refused to dance around the heads of the goats offered to the demons as a sacrifice by the pagans, as was the custom of the Lombards.

4. THE VENERABLE AGATHON

Agathon was a great Egyptian ascetic who practiced extreme asceticism in the fifth century. He was a contemporary of St. Macarius and a disciple of St. Lot [Egyptian Ascetic]. He labored and tried to fulfill all the commandments of our Lord. One of the brethren complimented him on a small knife with which he used to cut brushwood used for making baskets. Upon hearing this compliment, the saint joyfully handed over the knife to that brother as a gift. St. Agathon also said, "It would be very satisfying for me if I could assume unto myself the body of a leper and give him mine." Is this not perfect love? (*) (*) In the Greek Synaxarion, he is commemorated on January 8.

5. THE MARTYR EUTHALIA

This holy Euthalia was a virgin from Sicily. She had a mother of the same name and a brother named Sermilianus. All were unbaptized pagans. Her mother Euthalia suffered from an issue of blood. The holy martyrs, Alphius, Philadelphus and Cyrinus (May 10), appeared to her in a dream and told her that she would be healed only if she became baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Euthalia professed her faith in Christ, was baptized, and indeed recovered. Upon seeing this miracle, even Euthalia's daughter was baptized. After that, Sermilianus began to mock and ridicule his mother and sister because of their faith in Christ. He threatened them. The mother became frightened and fled her home. Then the brother began to persecute his sister. His sister was not frightened, for Christ was more dear to her than her brother. She said to Sermilianus, "I am a Christian and I am not afraid of death." The wicked brother then sent a servant to defile her. When the servant attacked St. Euthalia, he lost his eyesight. The evil brother saw this miracle but still remained hard of heart. Just as Cain pursued Abel, Sermilianus pursued his sister, caught her and beheaded her. Thus, the holy virgin Euthalia was wedded with the wreath of eternal glory. By this example, the words of the Lord Christ were fulfilled: that He brought a sword among men, which causes variances between relations in blood, but not between relations in faith. **"Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"** (St. Matthew 10:34,35).

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT AGATHON

Untalkative Agathon, for three years studies
With a pebble under his tongue to remain quiet and silent,
That by his tongue, sin, not to serve,
Only to speak words of solace to men
And to glorify God Who created him.
Once, when the saint began to speak
About anger, he said: The one over whom anger takes control
Does not please God, neither now nor never,
We have the power to resurrect the dead,
From the angered one, God does not accept any sacrifices.
And when death hung over Agathon,
The brethren gathered to see him frail,
Prayers he whispered with great fear,
Sigh upon sighs poured from his chest.
The brethren asked him: Are you also afraid,
O, all-good father, when before God you stand?
You were completely good to everyone, to all it is known,
Among the stones of men, you glistened as gold!
Then the elder said with countenance more radiant,
My children now, before the judgment of God I stand.
The judgment of man is one thing and another is the judgment of God--
And a more powerful sigh seized the elder!

REFLECTION

If someone loses his faith in God, he is recompensed with stupidity. Of all stupidities, it is difficult to say whether there is a greater one than this: that someone who calls himself a Christian and then proceeds to gather pathetic proofs for God and eternal life from other beliefs and philosophies. He who does not find gold among the wealthy; how will he find it among the poor? The revelation of eternal life, of facts, of proofs, of signs, and of actual visions of the spiritual world - all of these not only constitute the foundation of the Christian Faith, but constitute its walls, floors, ornaments, all the furnishings, the roof and the domes of the majestic building of the Christian Faith. A single ray from the spiritual world glistens through every word of the Gospels, not to mention the miraculous events, both in Evangelical and Post-Evangelical times as well as throughout the entire history of the Church for two-thousand years. Christianity has thrown open wide the gates of that world in so great a measure, that it should not be necessary to call it a religion, in order not to confuse it with other faiths and religions. It is a revelation! God's revelation!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ at the Mystical Supper:

1. How he had told His disciples that one of them would betray Him;
2. How after all that He did for Judas and after the washing of his feet and after indicating that He knew his betraying intention, Judas remained obstinate in his thoughts of selling his Teacher and his soul for silver;
3. How our Lord was saddened at the destruction and downfall of Judas as with the destruction and downfall of His other traitors and traitors of His Church throughout all ages till the end, all of which He foresaw with His All-Seeing Spirit.

HOMLIY

-About the Father and the Son-

"And whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me" (St. John 12:45).

He who sees the light also sees the sun beyond it. For could anyone see the sun and not the light? If the sun did not emit its light, none of us would know about the sun. All of our knowledge about the sun, we received with the help of the rays of light which came from the sun. No one has ever seen the sun with the help of some other light, other than that which comes from the sun itself. So it is with our knowing the Father with the help of the Son. He who does not know about the Son cannot know about the Father. He who knows the Son, knows the Father. He who sees the Son, sees also the Father. God cannot be known without His Light Who came among men. The Light of the Father is the Son. **"I am the Light" (St. John 8:2)**, said Christ. The Light shines in the darkness! The physical world would be completely in darkness if it were not for the light from the sun. The spiritual and moral world and all the life of mankind would be in darkness if it were not for the Light which is from the Father. That Light is Christ the Lord. Truly, brethren, there is no true light which illuminates the Being of God as does the light of Christ the Lord. He who sees Him sees God. He who does not see Him is in darkness.

O Lord, Son of God, always help our souls to see You, and through You, Your Heavenly Father and the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Trinity, one in essence and undivided.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 3 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS, EUTROPIUS, CLEONICUS AND BASILLISCUS

They were companions of St. Theodore Tiro. When the righteous Theodore gloriously died, they remained behind in prison, and for a long time they were not sentenced due to a change in the emperor's deputy in the city of Amasea. When the new governor arrived, more inhuman than his predecessor, he ordered that these three be brought before him. All three were youths. Eutropius and Cleonicus were blood brothers, and Basilliscus was a kinsman of St. Theodore. All three were like blood brothers in brotherly love. As such, they said before the governor, "As the Holy Trinity is undivided, so also are we by our faith undivided and in love inseparable." In vain was all the flattery on the part of the governor and in vain were his attempts to bribe Eutropius. First of all, the deputy invited Eutropius to dine with him. Eutropius refused, quoting from the Psalms, **"Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked" (Psalm 1:1)**. After that, the deputy offered him a large amount of money, one hundred-fifty litres of silver, which Eutropius also refused and reminded the governor that because of silver, Judas lost his soul. After all attempts at interrogation and torture, the first two were sentenced to be crucified, and Basilliscus was sentenced to be beheaded. And so it was, two brothers crucified on two crosses for which they gave thanks to Christ that He made them worthy of the same death by which He Himself died. The third, Basilliscus, was beheaded. They all entered the Kingdom of Joy where St. Theodore, their commander, awaited them and who before them was glorified by Christ the Lord and Victor. They suffered honorably in the year 308 A.D.

2. SAINT PIAMA THE EGYPTIAN

For the sake of Christ, Piama did not wish to marry; she dedicated herself to a life of asceticism in the home of her mother. She ate very little food, and that, every other day. She spent most of her time in prayer and contemplation. Piama possessed the "Gift of Discernment." She died peacefully, wedding her soul to the Lord about the year 377 A.D.

3. THE UNKNOWN MAIDEN

Coming from a wealthy home in Alexandria, she had a good father who suffered much and came to an evil end, and an evil mother who lived well, died peacefully and was buried with honors. Perplexed as to whether she should live according to the example of her father or her mother, this maiden had a vision which revealed to her the conditions of her mother and her father in the other world. She saw her father in the Kingdom of God and her mother in darkness and in torment. This vision helped the maiden to decide that she would dedicate her whole life to God and, like her father, would adhere to the commandments of God, without considering all the adversities and the misfortunes which she would have to endure. She was faithful to the will of God to the end and, with the help of God, was made worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven where she was reunited with her God-loving father.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS EUTROPIUS, CLEONICUS AND BASILLISCUS

The mind composed and uplifted to God the Most High,
The heart enflamed with love toward Him,
Does not care about pains nor about the body, worry,
Over such as these, only the Lord rules.
The mind fixed on Christ, that is most important.
This, during his torments, Saint Eutropius recognized
And Cleonicus his brother and beloved Basilliscus,
All three in the fire as though in the morning dew, were.
A mind fixed on Christ, about tortures does not care,
If pain persists, so also does prayer persist,
About pain, it does not think, but prayer, it weaves;
He who fears God does not fear pain.
Two blood brothers raised on the Cross:
Their bodies convulse, but the spirit does not stir,
Both glorify God Who glorified them;
Such an honorable death, to them, He gave.
The garment of the flesh is rent and removed
And the spirit races toward heaven; the spirit, than the body, is stronger;
Receive O God, they cry out, our spirit in the heights,
To You be enteral glory, O Son of God!

REFLECTION

Humanly speaking, Christ, by His obedience, elevated Himself to primacy in the Church, in the world and in the history of mankind. No one can be a good leader who has not completed the school of obedience. Adam forfeited the authority and dominion over the living creatures and the elements of nature at the very moment when he showed himself disobedient to God. The Abba Moses said, "Obedience begets obedience; if someone listens to God, God also listens to him." It is obvious then, that God listens to man more than man listens to God, especially when one takes into consideration how often and in how many ways man sins daily against the commandments of God. It is a fact that the Eternal God listens to us, corruptible as we are, more than we listen to Him. This should fill all of us with shame who still have a conscience. When St. Eutropius was being tortured, along with his two companions, he prayed to God, "Come to us in assistance as You came to Your servant Theodore Tiro." Suddenly, the ground shook and the obedient Lord appeared with His angels along with St. Theodore. The Lord said to the sufferers, "During the time of your torture, I stood before your faces and observed your patience. I will write your names in the Book of Life."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus at the Mystical Supper:

1. How He chose bread and wine, two ordinary elements of nourishment, and through them instituted His visible and invisible bond with the Church until the end;
2. How the Mystical Supper was preserved until today and how it will be preserved until the end of time as the Mystery of Communion;
3. How everyday, and almost every hour, somewhere in the world, a priest, consecrates the bread and wine and receives it as the Body and Blood of Christ. What a wonderful vision that is! [The Consecration of the bread and wine and receiving it as the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Christ]

HOMILY

-About love for your neighbor-

"Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit" (Philippians 1:24).

Inflamed with the love of God, the Apostle Paul acknowledged, in his Epistle to the Philippians, that for him death is a gain because his life is Christ's. Paul's love for Christ draws him toward death so that he may stand by Christ as soon as possible, and his love for the faithful again compels him to remain in the flesh. However, there are not two loves which attract the apostle and pulls him in two directions, but one and the same love which opens before him two treasures of wealth. One treasure is the blessed world in heaven, and the other treasure is the souls of the faithful on earth. That heavenly treasure is increased by this wealth from earth; this treasure overflows into the other. To go to heaven, the apostle is drawn by love and reward; to remain on earth, he is drawn by love and duty. When mortal man, my brethren, discovers that it is more important to remain in the flesh out of love for his brethren, what kind of miracle is it then that the eternal God knew, before the apostle, that it was more important to be in the flesh for the salvation of mankind than out of the flesh in the spiritual kingdom? Does not this confession of Paul before the Philippians explain to us with complete clarity the reasons for the Incarnation of the Son of God? There, in the heavens, is the true Kingdom of Christ and the true life of Christ without the mingling of sin and death. But the love of the Son of God toward men deemed it necessary to remain in the flesh on earth among men. Truly, we need to be thankful to the Apostle Paul that he, in explaining himself to us, explained the mystery of Christ's coming and His dwelling in the flesh.

O Lord, wonderful are You in Your saints.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 4 -

1. THE VENERABLE GERASIMUS

This remarkable and famous saint first learned about the ascetical life in the Egyptian Thebaid. He then went to the Jordan and there founded a community in which there were seventy monks. This community still exists today. He instituted a special Constitution [Rule] for his monastery by which the monks spent five days in their cells weaving baskets, reeds and rush mats. They were never allowed to light a fire in their cells. For five days they ate only a little dry bread and dates. The monks were required to keep their cells open so that when they went out, anyone could enter and remove whatever he needed from their cells. On Saturdays and Sundays they gathered in the monastic church. They had a common meal with a few vegetables and a little wine to the glory of God. Each monk would then bring in and place before the feet of the abbot that which he had made during the past five days. Each monk had only one robe. St. Gerasimus was an example to all. During the Great Lenten Fast he did not eat anything except what he received in Holy Communion. On one occasion, he saw a lion roaring from pain because there was a thorn in his paw. Gerasimus drew near to the lion, crossed himself, and removed the thorn in the animal's paw. The lion became so tame that he returned with Gerasimus to the monastery and remained there until the elder's death. When Gerasimus died, the lion succumbed from sorrow for him. Gerasimus attended the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon, 451 A.D.] during the reign of Marcian and Plucheria. Even though in the beginning, Gerasimus leaned toward the Monophysite heresy of Eutyches and Dioscorus, he was a great defender and champion of Orthodoxy at the Council. St. Euthymius dissuaded him from this heresy. Of all of the disciples of Gerasimus, the most famous was St. Cyriacus the Recluse. St. Gerasimus died in the year 475 A.D., and was translated into the eternal joy of his Lord.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS PAUL AND JULIANA

Paul and Juliana were brother and sister from Ptolemais in Phoenicia. They were brutally tortured for the sake of Christ by the Emperor Aurelius and were finally beheaded. Before their martyrdom many of their miracles were manifested, and were witnessed by many pagans. Through these miracles, many of the pagans were converted to the Faith. Several of these were beheaded and received their wreaths in the year 273 A.D.

3. SAINT JAMES THE FASTER

He lived in the sixth century. He was so perfected in pleasing God that James cured the most gravely ill through his prayers. But the enemy of mankind lured him into great temptations. At one time, an immoral woman was sent to him by some scoffers. She misrepresented herself to James, pretending to be crying yet all the while luring him into sin. Seeing that he was going to yield to sin, James placed his left hand into the fire and held it there for some time until it was scorched. Seeing this, the woman was filled with fear and terror, repented and amended her life. On another occasion, James did not flee from his temptation, but rather he succumbed to a maiden, who was brought as a lunatic by her parents to be cured of her insanity. He, indeed, healed her and after that, sinned with her. Then in order to conceal his sin he killed her and threw her into a river. As is common, the steps from adultery to murder are not too distant. James lived for ten years after that as a penitent in an open grave. At that time there was a great drought which caused both people and live-stock to suffer. As a result of his prayers, rain fell; James knew that God had forgiven him. Here is an example, similar to that of David, of how twisted is the demon of evil; how by God's permission, the greatest spiritual giants can be overthrown, and through sincere and contrite penance, God, according to His mercy, forgives even the greatest sins and does not punish those when they punish themselves.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JAMES THE FASTER

Who from the greater height falls, is injured more,
To the heights whoever is lifted, let him cautiously shield himself.
The holy apostle writes: "Whoever thinks that he is standing secure
should take care not to fall," (*) let him fear God.
James the Faster, according to the height of his soul, a giant was he,
But, he, from the heights slipped, and the devil toppled him;
One sin, to the other hastens, adultery rushes to murder,
James the Faster, himself, punishes, and God comforted him.
All virtues, one sin, is able to erode;
One hole in the granary, all the wheat pours out.
A house filled with fragrances, one handful of filth
Empties it of redolence and fills it with stench.
One-hundred victories nor one-hundred celebrations do not help
When in the final battle, the head is lost.
The spiritual life is a struggle against the hordes of the devil,
In this battle, from the beginning the proud are defeated.
Whoever invokes the Name of God with profound humility
That one, in battle, will be protected by God's mercy.

(*) I Corinthians 10:12

REFLECTION

If the philosophies of men were able to satisfy man, why did the philosophers Justin and Origen become Christians? Why did Basil, Chrysostom and Gregory, who in Athens studying all the philosophy of the Greeks, receive baptism? And why did Blessed Augustine, who knew the wisdom of both the Greeks and the Romans, throw away all and seek salvation and illumination in the Faith of Christ? And St. Clement of Rome, who was very wealthy and very learned? And St. Catherine, who was from the royal house and knew all the worldly wisdom of the Egyptians? And the young Crown Prince Joasaph in India, to whom was known all the Indian philosophies? And many, many more who primarily sought explanations to the puzzles of the world and illumination for their souls in philosophy and, after that, entered the Church and worshipped the Lord Christ?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Mystery of Communion as the presence of our Lord Jesus in the Church on earth:

1. As the fulfillment of His promise, **"And behold, I am with you always until the end of the age"** (St. Matthew 28:20).
2. As His constant support of the faithful, to whom He said, **"Without me, you can do nothing"** (St. John 15:5).

HOMILY

-About Pilate's wavering-

"Consequently, Pilate tried to release Him, then, he handed Him over to be crucified" St. John 19:12,16).

From where does this contradiction in Pilate stem? From where is this dual will in one and the same man? While he stood under the radiant face of Christ, Pilate from all his heart wanted to release the Just Man. But, when the darkness of the Jews overcame him, he agreed to the works of darkness. This is the seed [Jesus Christ], fallen among the thorns. While the face of Christ shown on the seed, the seed took root, but as soon as the seed was left without this light, the darkness of the thorns smothered it. When the Lord Jesus authoritatively spoke to Pilate of the Heavenly Kingdom, saying to him, **"You would have no power over Me, if it had not been given to you from above"** (St. John 19:11), Pilate then felt overcome by the fear of God. But when the masses of the Jews cried out to Pilate, **"If you release Him, you are not a friend of Caesar"** (St. John 19:12), then Pilate was overcome with fear from the worldly king. His fear for the body overcame his fear for his soul, as it happens occasionally, even today. Pilate was a disciple of worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom does not offer strength but instills fear. Worldly wisdom does not sustain the soul but the body. Worldly wisdom does not instill fear for the soul but fear for the body and all that is physical. Here, in Pilate, we see an obvious and a pathetic example of what kind of men worldly wisdom produces and educates, sidestepping God and going against Christ. Pilate's weak character and wavering soul is a picture, not only of pagans, but also of weak Christians. Certain Christians daily, imperceptibly and, more often, unconsciously, would for a while like to eliminate Christ from the darkened and evil instinct of the Jews within themselves. Then, at other times, they would like to abandon Him to that instinct for crucifixion. This always happens when a Christian transgresses some of the commandments of Christ for the sake of fulfilling some of his own physical desires. For a moment, that commandment enlightens the heart of a wavering Christian and again, for a moment, the physical darkness overcomes him so much that he completely succumbs to it. O Lord, long-suffering, do not turn away the radiance of Your face from us even for one twinkling of the eye, so that the darkness does not overcome us.

O Lord help us that we will remain children of the light until the end.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 5 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR CONON OF ISAURIA

He was brought up in the Faith of Christ and baptized in the name of the All-Holy and Life-giving Trinity by the Archangel Michael, the Commander of the Angelic Hosts of God. Until his death, the archangel of God invisibly watched over him. Conon was illumined and empowered by the Grace of the Holy Spirit so that his heart was not driven by anything worldly but only by the spiritual and heavenly. When his parents forced him into marriage, the first evening he took a candle and placed it under a utensil and asked his bride, "Which is better, light or darkness?" She replied, "Light." He then began to talk to her about the Faith of Christ and the spiritual life as being far more superior and more appealing than the physical. In this he succeeded. Afterwards Conon converted his wife and her parents to the Faith of Christ. Conon and his wife lived as brother and sister. Shortly thereafter, his wife and parents died, and he withdrew completely from this worldly life and devoted himself completely to prayer, fasting and pious thoughts. He performed great miracles through which he converted many to Christianity. Among other examples, Conon compelled evil spirits to serve him. During the time of a persecution, he was captured, tortured and pierced throughout with knives. The sick anointed themselves with his blood and they were healed. After that, he lived for two additional years in his town of Isauria and presented himself before the Lord. This glorious saint lived and was martyred in the second century.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR CONON THE GARDENER

Conon was born in Nazareth. He was kind and innocent and in all things found favor with God. During the reign of Decius, Conon was persecuted, suffered and martyred for Christ. Throughout, he remained strong in the Faith. He sharply rebuked and criticized the pagan judges because of their stupidity. With nails driven into his feet and tied to the prince's chariot, this virtuous and innocent saint was dragged until he was completely exhausted and fell. It was then that he prayed for the last time and gave up his soul to God in the year 251 A.D.

3. VENERABLE HESYCHIUS THE FASTER

Hesychius was born near Brusa in the eighth century. He then retreated to Mount Maion which had an evil reputation because of demonic apparitions. There, Hesychius built a hut for himself and a chapel dedicated to the honor of St. Andrew the Apostle. He surrounded it with a garden which he cultivated in order to live by his own labor. By his prayers he performed many miracles. Hesychius prophesied that after his death a convent would be built on that place. A month before, he foresaw the day and hour of his death. At midnight on the foreseen day, some men saw his hut glowing with an extraordinary light. When they arrived, they found him dead. Hesychius died peacefully and was received into the kingdom of His Lord in the year 790 A.D. He was buried in the church of St. Andrew. Later, Theophylactus, the Bishop of Amasea, translated his body to Amasea.

4. VENERABLE MARK THE ASCETIC

Mark was an ascetic and miracle-worker. In his fortieth year he was tonsured a monk by his teacher St. John Chrysostom. Mark then spent sixty more years in the wilderness of Nitria in fasting, prayer and writing many spiritual works concerning the salvation of souls. He knew the entire Holy Scriptures by heart. He was very merciful and kind. He wept much for the misfortunes which had befallen all of God's creation. On one occasion, while crying, he prayed to God for a blind puppy of a hyena and the puppy received its sight. In thanksgiving the mother of the hyena brought him a sheepskin. The saint forbade the hyena in the future to kill any more sheep of poor people. He received Communion at the hands of the angels. His homilies concerning the spiritual law, on repentance, and on sobriety, etc., are ranked among the first-class literature of the Church. These works were praised by the great Patriarch Photius himself.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

The angels, our older and superior brothers are,
The Will of God Most High, their will.
Than light, more bright are they, swifter and brighter,
Of the air on the mountain, lighter and fresher,
In light they are clothed, the light of their Creator,
Tireless laborers of the work of Christ.
For men they are concerned, men, their only concern:
How to God return, the prodigal son,
How, from a strange land, their younger brothers
To return to the joyful courts of the Householder.
Michael, Archistratig, the first among the first,
What Venus is among the stars, he is among the angels;
To every penitent he hurries, to lift him up to God,
No matter how many penitents, he reaches them all.
To serve, serve and serve--for him that is joy,
Even in heaven, service to one's neighbor is paramount.
Service which strengthens life and makes a mother jubilant,
Service which adorns wreaths, unfading,
That service for the angels is joy and celebration
For it is directed to the glory of God and for men, salvation.

REFLECTION

Why do some people, well educated and baptized as Christians, fall away from Christianity and give themselves over to philosophy and to learned theories, pretending these to be something more truthful than Christianity? They do so for two principal reasons: either out of a totally superficial understanding of Christianity or because of sin. A superficial understanding of Christ rejects Him and flees from Christ as does a criminal from a judge. Superficial and sinful Christians were as often enraged and infuriated with Christianity as were the pagans. To the superficial and culpable, it was more comfortable for them to bathe in the shallow swamp of human thoughts than in the perilous depth of Christ. For those who sincerely follow Christ, He constantly calls them to a greater and greater depth; as He once said to the Apostle Peter, **"Put out into deep water"** (St. Luke 5:4). St. Mark the Ascetic writes that the law of God is understood in accordance with the fulfillment of the commandments of God: "Ignorance compels a person to speak in opposition to that which is beneficial and insolence multiplies vice."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Mystery of Communion as a Mystery of the Perfection of Love:

1. Because on the part of Christ, it means giving completely of Himself to His faithful;
2. Because of this, Christ is received with faith and trust on the part of the faithful;
3. Because of this, it leads to the joyful, fruitful and saving union of God with man.

HOMILY

-About traveling with Christ into the deep-

"Put out into deep water" (St. Luke 5:4).

This is how our Lord commanded Peter and the rest of the apostles **"after He had finished speaking"** (St. Luke 5:4). This means that He first gave instructions and immediately following that, He called them to action. This is also important for us. For as soon as we learn something from the Gospels, we immediately need to go out and implement it. The works of the disciple are dear to the Lord, not only the disciple. **"Put out into deep water."** Along the shore, from the shallow waters, our Lord spoke to the people who were less enlightened in the mysteries of God's Kingdom. He invited the apostles out into the deep. There is less danger in the shallow waters, but the catch is also smaller. In the shallow waters there are snakes, frogs and other lesser repulsive water creatures. That is all the danger. In shallow waters there are only small fish; that is the entire catch. But in the greater depths, the danger is also greater. There you have large sea creatures and great storms. That is dangerous. But there are also much larger and better fish in enormous quantity; that is the catch. O, enlightened one, come therefore into the deep! **"Put out into the deep"** mysterious sea of life, but do not set out without Christ in your boat. By no means. You might spend the entire night of your life not catching anything, as Peter said, **"We have toiled all night and have taken nothing"** (St. Luke 4:5). Not only that, but you could face far worse if Christ is not in your boat. Perhaps the winds could carry you away and cast you into an abyss. Perhaps the monstrous and enormous beasts of the sea will consume you. The winds, O enlightened one, those are your own passions which accompany you unavoidably if you set out into the deep without Christ. The enormous and monstrous beasts of the sea are demons who, with the blinking of an eye, can destroy you as with the blinking of an eye **"the herd of about two thousand swine rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned"** (St. Mark 5:13).

However, if you are going out with Christ into the deep, do not be afraid of anything; but go rejoicefully and courageously glued to Christ. You will lay hold of the best catch; and you will fill both boats with it, the physical and the spiritual. You will snare the best catch, O dedicated one, and, without any dangers, you will arrive to the shore, to the shore of the Kingdom of Christ. Nowhere without Christ! Neither in shallow places nor into the deep. In the shallow places you will become vexed by hunger and by many minor disgusts, but into the deep a greater evil will befall you.

O, my Almighty Savior, You are our Helmsman, our Defense, our Harbor.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 6 -

1. THE HOLY FORTY-TWO MARTYRS FROM AMMORIA

They were all commanders of the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus. When the Emperor Theophilus lost the battle against the Saracens at the city of Ammoria, the Saracens captured the city, enslaved many Christians and among them these commanders. The remaining Christians were either killed or sold into slavery. The commanders were thrown into prison where they remained for seven years. Many times the Muslim leaders came to them. They counseled and advised the commanders to embrace the Islamic Faith, but the commanders did not want to hear about it. When the Saracens spoke to the commanders, saying, "Mohammed is the true prophet and not Christ," the commanders asked them, "If there were two men debating about a field and the one said, 'This field is mine,' and the other, 'It is not, it is mine,' and near by, one of them had many witnesses saying it is his field and the other had no witnesses, but only himself, what would you say, 'Whose field is it?'" The Saracens answered, "Indeed, to him who had many witnesses!" "You have judged correctly," the commanders answered. That is the way with Christ and Mohammed. Christ has many witnesses: the Prophets of old, from Moses to John the Forerunner, whom you also recognize and who witness to and about Him [Christ], but Mohammed witnesses only to himself that he is a prophet and does not have even one witness. The Saracens were ashamed and again they tried to defend their faith in this manner: "Our faith is better than the Christian Faith as proved by this: God gave us the victory over you and gave us the best land in the world and a kingdom much greater than Christianity." To that the commanders replied, "If it were so, then the idolatry of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Hellenes, Romans, and the fire-worship of the Persians would be the true faith for, at one time, all of these people conquered the others and ruled over them. It is evident that your victory, power and wealth do not prove the truth of your faith. We know that God, at times, gives victory to Christians and, at other times, allows torture and suffering so as to correct them and to bring them to repentance and purification of their sins." After seven years, they were beheaded in the year 845 A.D. Their bodies were then thrown into the Euphrates river, but they floated to the other side of the shore where they were gathered and honorably buried by Christians.

2. THE BLESSED JOB

Job was born in Moscow in the year 1635 A.D. Church singing and liturgical services drew him to the Church. He became the spiritual father to Emperor Peter the Great but, because of intrigue, he withdrew into the Slovecki Monastery, where he underwent a difficult life of asceticism. In the year 1720 A.D., in his eighty fifth year, he died in the Lord. Before his death he cried out, "Blessed is the God of our Fathers and as He is thus, I am not afraid but, with joy, I leave this world."

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS CONON THE FATHER AND CONON THE SON

When the father was already an old man, the son was a youngster of seventeen years. During the reign of Domentian, they were sawed in half for their faith in Christ and were glorified and honored in the Church on earth and in heaven. They honorably suffered in the year 275 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT CONON

The emperor counsels the youthful Conon;
From old age, your father is deranged,
You, young man, do not harken to his words.
But deny and forget Christ,
Offer sacrifice to the Roman gods,
And then remain with me in honor.
The youthful Conon courageously replied:
It is written, O emperor torturer,
That the son does what from the father, he sees,
And of the father's deed, he is not ashamed.
My father, the True Faith teaches me,
The True Faith and the knowledge of God,
That I know the One God,
My Creator, Merciful,
That I know Christ the Savior,
From death, my Redeemer.
Whatever you do with the body of my father,
This also do with mine;
But over the soul, you have no authority,
Our souls are our possessions
And the possessions of the Son of God.

REFLECTION

For as long as you are on earth, consider yourself a guest in the Household of Christ. If you are at the table, it is He who treats you. If you breathe air, it is His air you breathe. If you bathe, it is in His water you are bathing. If you are traveling, it is over His land that you are traveling. If you are amassing goods, it is His goods you are amassing. If you are squandering, it is His goods that you are squandering. If you are powerful, it is by His permission that you are strong. If you are in the company of men, you and the others are His guests. If you are out in nature, you are in His garden. If you are alone, He is present. If you set out or turn anywhere, He sees you. If you do anything, He remembers. He is the most considerate Householder by Whom you were ever hosted. Be careful then toward Him. In a good household, the guest is required to behave. These are all simple words but they convey to you a great truth. All the saints knew this truth and they governed their lives by it. That is why the Eternal Householder rewarded them with eternal life in heaven and glory on earth.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Mystery of Communion as a life-giving cure for the soul and body:

1. As a cure that heals and cleanses the soul from sinful maladies and restores it to life;
2. As a cure that heals and cleanses the body from avarice and vice and restores it to life;
3. As a cure that enlivens man and makes him a healthy member of the immortal Body of Christ, who, if he is not, would remain decayed to the end and eventually, he would be cut off and cast aside.

HOMILY

-About the heir and the slave-

"I mean that as long as the heir is not of age, he is no different from the slave" (Galatians 4:1).

As long as the heir apparent is in the cradle, what would make him better than the son of a slave? Neither is his body better, nor are his thoughts more elevated, nor are his wishes or desires more pure. Such is the son of the king; so is the son of the slave; so is the son of the beggar. For a few years the son of the king does not differ from the son of the slave. However, when the son of the king reaches maturity and with full consciousness of his dignity, he receives authority over the kingdom, and when the son of a slave reaches full maturity and with full consciousness, he succumbs to the yoke of slavery. Then the enormous difference is seen. Then it is clearly manifest that the heir and the slave are not equal. The slave has to serve and the king has to rule. The apostle means to say that it is the same with Christians and with those who are not Christians. The non-Christian is a slave to nature and the Christian rules over nature. The non-Christian era of the history of mankind shows us how man was the slave to the elements of nature, the slave of the flesh, the slave of idols and creatures. The Christian era of the history of mankind shows us how man was master and owner, a nobleman of a royal race and heir to all. Even those who knew about the One True God, as the Israelites knew, were not like children toward God nor heirs toward their father but were slaves and servants toward their Lord and Judge. **"But when the fullness of time had come" (Galatians 4:4)**, the Only-Begotten Son of God came to earth. He made it possible **"so that we might receive adoption" (Galatians 4:5)**, and to address the Spirit of God and cry out, **"Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:5)**. Brethren why did Christ come to earth? He did so to make us better than slaves and to give us the right of sonship and the duty of the master. The right of sonship, that in the name Christ, we can call God, Father, and the duty of the master to rule over ourselves, over our flesh, over our thoughts, over our desires, and over all nature around us.

O Only-Begotten Son of God, by Your mercy and sacrifice, we have received the adoption of sons.
O help us that with Your help we may persevere to the end in purity and in truth.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 7 -

1. THE HOLY SEVEN PRIESTLY-MARTYRS IN CHERSON: BASIL, EPHREM, EUGENIUS, ELPIDUS, AGATHADORUS, AETHERIUS, AND CAPITO

All of them were bishops in Cherson at different times. All suffered and were martyred at the hands of unbelievers, whether they were Jews, Greeks or Scythians, except Aetherius, who died peacefully. All of them were sent by the Patriarch of Jerusalem as missionaries to bring the light of the Gospel to these wild and uncivilized areas. They were tortured and suffered for their Lord. In Cherson, Basil raised the son of a prince from the dead which embittered the Jews and they, in turn, brought an accusation against him. He was tied and bound by the feet and dragged through the streets until his soul departed him. Ephrem was beheaded. Eugenius, Elpidus and Agathadorus were beaten with rods and stoned until they gave up their souls to God. Aetherius lived during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great. He governed the Church in freedom and peace, erected a large church in Cherson, and died peacefully. When the last of them, Capito, was appointed bishop for the wild and savage Scythians, they sought a sign from him that they may believe. They suggested that he enter into a fiery furnace and, if he was not consumed, they would all believe in Christ. With fervent prayers and hope in God, Capito placed his episcopal pallium over his shoulders, signed himself with the sign of the cross, and entered into the flaming hot furnace, keeping his heart close to God. He remained in the flames for about an hour without any injury or damage, either to his body or to his vesture. He came out in good health. Then, at once, all of them cried out: "One is God, the God of the Christians, great and mighty, Who protects His servant in the flaming furnace." The entire city and all the vicinity were then baptized. This miracle was spoken of at length at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325 A.D.]. The participants in the Council all glorified God and praised the steadfast and solid faith of St. Capito. It happened that while Capito was traveling along the Dnieper river, he was captured by the pagan Scythians and was drowned. All these seven priestly-martyrs suffered during the early years of the fourth century.

2. THE VERERABLE EMILIANUS

Emilianus was born in Rome and committed many grave sins in his youth. When Emilianus came to his senses, he refrained from sinning and began to tremble just thinking about the judgment of God. Emilianus immediately entered a monastery and by fasting, vigils and obedience, he tamed and shriveled his body. He was an ideal example to his brethren in all virtuous acts of asceticism. Frequently at night, he would step out of the monastery and enter into a nearby cave to pray. Not knowing where Emilianus was going, the abbot of the monastery secretly followed him one night. The abbot saw Emilianus standing at prayer in reverence and in tears. All at once, a heavenly light, brighter than the sun, encompassed the entire mountain but especially the cave and Emilianus. A voice was heard from heaven saying, "Emilianus, your sins are forgiven you." Filled with fright, the abbot hurried back to the monastery. The next day, he revealed to the brethren what he had seen and heard the previous night. Great respect was shown to Emilianus by the brethren. He lived long and died to the Lord. (*)

(*) On this date St. Lawrence is commemorated in the great Greek Synaxarion. He was a benefactor of the Monastery Phaneromene on the island of Salamis. He lived in Megara as a married man with two sons. He was righteous and pious. The Holy Birth-Giver of God appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to go to Salamis and there to restore her church. He went there and, indeed, he discovered the destroyed ruins and built a new church. Here, he was tonsured a monk and died on March 7, 1770 A.D. Afterwards, many miracles occurred in this monastery over the relics of St. Lawrence.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EMILIANUS

Emilianus, a grave sinner,
And from sin, the soul aches,
Emilianus, disconsolate
For forgiveness, he prays to God:
O Most High, O Most wonderful,
From Whom the sun has light,
From Whom the angelic choir, its wakeful
Existence, joy and radiance receive!
For You only, O God, do I care,
Repentantly, I return to You,
Only to You do I offer thanks
That now, I truly comprehend life.
Tears, tears, tears, I shed,
Body and spirit now are fasting,
Vision of the world and hearing I conceal,
Forgive, O God, forgive, forgive!
For Your mercy I am a field,
Weed me and cultivate me,
Let my soul be alive,
And the flesh suffer and feel pain.
Of all men, I am the worst,
Behold, I judge myself,
Just do not judge me, O God,
I fear You, Only You!

REFLECTION

A thick rope is made from thin, fibrous strands of hemp. One thin fiber cannot hold you tied nor can it strangle you. For you will easily, as in jest, break it and free yourself from it. If you are tied by a thick rope, you can be held bound and even be strangled by it. Neither can you break it easily nor free yourself from it. As a thick rope consists of thin and weak fibers, so the passions of man consist of minor sins. Man can break off and turn away from the beginnings of minor sins. But, when sin after sin is repeated, the weave becomes all the more stronger and stronger until in the end a passion is created, which then turns man into some kind of monster as only it knows how. You cannot easily cut it off, nor distance yourself from it, nor can you divorce yourself from it. O, if only men would beware and take care of the beginnings of sins! Then, they would not have to endure much in freeing themselves from passions. "To cut off rooted passions is as difficult as cutting off the fingers," said a monk from the Holy Mountain. To free himself from sinful passions, St. Emilianus was helped by thinking thoughts of death and, understandably, the Grace of God, without which it is extremely difficult to rid oneself of the fetters of passion. To think often of impending death, to repent and to implore Grace from Almighty God, these three save a man from the bondage of sin. St. Sisoës was asked, "At which time can passions be uprooted?" The saint replied, "As soon as one passion takes root in you, uproot it immediately."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus at prayer in Gethsemane:

1. How He falls on His face and prays three times, **"My Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (St. Matthew 26:39), and again, "Your will be done" (St. Matthew 26:42).**
2. How He sweated at prayer, **"And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (St. Luke 22:44).**
3. How all of this was because of you and me; because of my sins and your sins; and for the sake of my salvation and your salvation.

HOMILY

-About the hand of the betrayer-

"And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray Me is with Me on the table(St. Luke 22:21).

It is most difficult for a general to wage war when he has an enemy within the camp; not only external enemies, but internal enemies among his own. Judas was considered among his own. However, he was the enemy from within. Rows of enemies crowded and closed ranks around Christ and, from within, Judas was preparing betrayal. His hand was on the table which Christ blessed, and his thoughts were aligned with the enemies where darkest evil, hatred and malice seethed against the gentle Lord.

Is it not also the same today, that the hand of the many traitors of Christ are at the table with Him? Which table is not Christ's? On what table are not His gifts? He is the Householder and He nourishes and feeds His guests. The guests have nothing of their own, nothing! All good and all abundance which is given to them is given to them by the hand of Christ. Therefore, is it not so that Christ is present at every table as a Householder and as a Servant? Therefore, are not those also the hands of all who even today betray Christ on the table together with Him? They eat His bread and they speak against Him. They warm themselves by His sun and they slander His name. They breathe His air and they rise up against His Church. They live off His mercy and they banish Him from their homes, from their schools, from their courts, from their books and from their hearts. They trample His commandments willfully, maliciously and ridicule His law. Are they not then the betrayers of Christ and the followers of Judas? Do not be afraid of them! God did not command that we be afraid of them but wait to see their end. Our Lord was not afraid of Judas nor is He afraid of all the traitorous hordes until the end of time. He knows their end and He already has His victory in His hands. Therefore, do not you be afraid either. Adhere faithfully to Christ the Lord, both when it appears to you that His causes succeed and go forward in the world and then, again, when it appears to you that His causes collapse and perish. Do not be afraid! If you become frightened, perhaps your hand will be found clenched under the hand of Judas at the table of Christ.

O Lord, All-Victorious, sustain us with Your power and mercy.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 8 -

1. SAINT THEOPHYLACTUS, BISHOP OF NICOMEDIA

When the emperor's advisor Tarasius, as a layman, was elected Patriarch of Constantinople, then with him and from him, many of his friends, admirers, and others of the laity received the monastic tonsure. Among them was Theophylactus. Tarasius appointed him Bishop of Nicomedia. As a bishop, Theophylactus was a good shepherd to his entrusted flock and proved to be exceptionally filled with compassion toward the less fortunate and indigent. After the death of St. Tarasius, the Patriarchal Throne was occupied by Nicephorus and shortly after that, the Imperial Throne was occupied by Leo the Armenian, who was an Iconoclast and, as such, raised up a absolute storm in the Church of Christ. Even though Iconoclasm had been anathematized by the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 783 A.D.], nevertheless, Emperor Leo re-instated it and by this wanted to supplant Orthodoxy. Saint Theophylactus opposed the emperor to his face and, when the emperor would not yield, Theophylactus said to him, "O emperor, violent injury will unexpectedly befall you, and you will not find anyone who will save you from it." Because of these words and by the order of the emperor, Theophylactus was ousted from his position and banished into exile, where he spent thirty years undergoing many hardships and insults and, where, in the end, he rendered his soul to the Lord about the year 845 A.D.

2. THE HOLY PRIEST-MARTYR THEODORETUS

The Emperor Constantine built a cathedral church of special beauty in Antioch. The people called this church "the golden church" because of the gold-plated exterior and interior and because of the many appointments of gold and silver housed in it. The emperor donated a great deal of land to this church for the upkeep of the clergy whose number was significant. The custodian of these appointments and all other precious items in the church was the presbyter Theodoretus, (*) and rare devotion. When Julian the Apostate began his reign, he denied Christ and, even though he was baptized, stirred up a persecution against Christians. Julian, his uncle of the same name, came to Antioch and began to plunder the "golden church." He summoned Theodoretus, the custodian of the treasury, to court and counseled him to deny Christ. Not only did Theodoretus refuse to deny Christ, but he also insulted the Emperor Julian because of his apostasy from the True Faith and his return to idolatry, as a dog returning to his own vomit. When the wicked judge, out of rage, urinated in the "golden church," St. Theodoretus prophesied a horrible death for him, which shortly happened. Theodoretus was beheaded by an axe for his faith in Christ. From the time that Judge Julian had urinated in the church, he felt pains in the lower part of his body. The entire lower half of his body was eaten away by worms, so that he vomited up his apostate soul in the most horrible pains. Also, according to the prophecy of Theodoretus, Felix, Julian's assistant, died of a hemorrhage from the mouth immediately after the beheading of this righteous man. St. Theodoretus was beheaded in the year 362 A.D. and was translated to the All-glorious kingdom of Christ the King.]

(*) In the Greek Synaxarion, St. Theodoretus is commemorated on March 3.

HYMN OF PRAISE

ADAM'S LAMENT

Outside the empty Paradise, Adam folds his hands,
Banished and alienated he throbbed from pain;
The angels of heaven, until then his companions,
As beautiful dreams, flew hurriedly away,
Before the banished one, before the cursed one,
Until yesterday, the mighty proprietor of Paradise!
And Adam sobbed on the cold boulder:
Woe to my descendants! Woe to me a sinner!
For one moment, my Creator I despised
To be despised by all that was created
Throughout the days and nights, throughout the centuries long,
Instead of God, a serpent to have for a companion!
Instead of me, over all created things to rule,
Over me, now, everything will rule:
The winds and the heat, the elements of nature,
The beasts and scorpions, repulsive things and serpents.
Instead of freedom, behold, fear grips me,
And confuses my thoughts and chills me to the bone.
There is only One Who is able to help:
The One that I offended--Have mercy O God!

REFLECTION

Be more trusting in the Lord than in your own mother. Confess all to Him. He will not betray you. Embrace all of His commandments as beneficial. They will not deceive you. In as much as you trust in God, so also be vigilant toward your enemies, toward your body, the world and demons. All of this was expressed much better by the glorious saint of God, Ephrem the Syrian, saying, "In embracing the commandments of God, have simplicity, and in warding off hostile intrigues, have the cunning (the dove and the serpent)."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane:

1. How He repeatedly commands the disciples to watch and pray to God;
2. How He rises three times from His sweat-inducing prayer, goes over to the disciples and finds that they are asleep;
3. How they were all overcome by temptation because they forsook their teacher and fled for they were not prepared to overcome the fear of men;
4. How we, too, become lazy and are not vigilant and do not pray to God, for when temptation comes, we forsake the Lord Christ.

HOMILY

-About the vision of the eyes and the vision of the soul-

"Coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance"(Philippians 2:7).

This, the Apostle Paul says, that same apostle who said about the Lord Jesus: **"He is in the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Colossians 1:15)**, and **"In Him dwells the whole fullness of the Deity bodily" (Colossians 2:9)**. This is the Lord according to His essence and according to His internal nature but **"found human in appearance."** Men, whose hearts are hardened as stone and whose minds are darkened, recognize objects around themselves only through their eyes. Such men, in those days, looked with their eyes and saw Jesus as a man. It was not given to them to know anymore about Him except what their physical eyes saw. Physical man saw in Jesus and beheld only the body but did not see in that body neither God nor a perfect and sinless man.

Even today, whosoever judges only by that which he sees denies to Jesus all that he cannot see in other men. No one can speak the truth about the Lord who judges Him only with their eyes. That which the eyes can see of Him is but a small veil behind which is hidden the eternal mysteries of heaven and the greatest mysteries of time and of earth. In order to see that which is hidden in Him, behind the physical veil, one must have spiritual vision, which is the Spirit of God in one's heart, the Spirit Who draws back the veil and reveals the mysteries.

O, Lord, Mystery Most Sweet, make us worthy of the visit of Your Holy Spirit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 9 -

1. THE HOLY FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTEA

All of them were soldiers in the Roman army and steadfastly believed in the Lord Jesus. When the persecution of Christians began during the reign of Licinius, they were brought to trial before the commander. When he threatened to strip them of their honor as soldiers, one of them, St. Candidus, responded, "Not only the honor of being a soldier, but take away our bodies, for nothing is more dear or honorable, to us than Christ our God." After that, the commander ordered his servants to stone the holy martyrs. While the servants were hurling stones at the Christians, the stones turned and fell back on the servants, severely striking them. One of the stones struck the commander's face and knocked out his teeth. The torturers, angry as wild beasts, bound all of the holy martyrs and tossed them into the lake and stationed a guard around it so as to prevent any of them from escaping. There was a terrible frost and the lake froze around the bodies of the martyrs. So that their pain and suffering would be worsened, and in order to persuade one of them to deny Christ and acknowledge the idols of Rome, the torturers heated a bath by the side of the lake in sight of the frozen martyrs. Indeed, one of them was persuaded. He came out of the water and entered the bath. And behold, an extraordinary light appeared from heaven which warmed the water in the lake and the bodies of the martyrs. With that light, thirty-nine wreaths descended from heaven over their heads. Upon seeing this, a guard on the shore removed all his clothes, confessed the Name of the Lord Jesus and entered the lake so that he could become worthy of the fortieth wreath in place of the betrayer. Indeed, the last wreath descended upon him. The next day the entire town was astonished when they saw that the martyrs were still alive. Then, the wicked judges ordered that the lower part of their legs be broken and their bodies thrown into the water so Christians could not recover them. On the third day the martyrs appeared to Peter, the local bishop, and summoned him to gather their relics and remove them from the water. The bishop with his clergy went out into the dark of night and beheld the relics of the martyrs shining brightly in the water. Every bone which was separated from their bodies floated to the top and glowed like a candle. Bishop Peter gathered and honorably buried them. The souls of these martyrs, who suffered for all of us, went to the Lord Jesus, resurrected with glory. They suffered honorably and were crowned with unfading glory in the year 320 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE FILOMORUS

He lived and mortified himself in Galatia in the fourth century. It is said about him that he was so perfected in all virtues that he resembled an angel rather than a man. He was especially glorified because of his patience. He was persecuted by the Emperor Julian the Apostate and suffered much for Christ. After the death of Julian, this wicked persecutor of Christ, St. Filomorus lived peacefully, benefiting many. He died in his eightieth year.

3. SAINT CAESARIUS

St. Caesarius, the brother of Gregory the Theologian who died in the year 369 A.D., was also a theological writer. Among other things he attempted to answer the question: How long a time did Adam and Eve spend in Paradise before their expulsion? Some have determined the time to be six hours; others, twenty-four hours; and still others, three days. St. Caesarius was of the mind that the length of time was forty days. "Because," he says, "Our Lord fasted forty days in the wilderness and during that time He was tempted by the devil. Since the old Adam could not resist the temptation of the devil in the abundance of Paradise, the new Adam resisted the devil gallantly in the hungry and thirsty wilderness."

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY FORTY MARTYRS

Martyrs in the lake shackled by frost,
Strongly adhering to Holy Faith, by hope illumined,
To the dear God, cried out: You, Who astonished the world
By Your awesome sacrifice and resurrection, O You, enliven us!
The firmament of heaven and everything created, glorify You,
Behold, the abyss, fire, hail, snow, ice and heat glorify You!
You helped the great Moses, your servant,
And Joshua Son of Nun, and after that Elisha,
That nature, calm the waters and it, to divide,
Now, help your faithful as you have until now,
Do not allow the frost to be stronger than man,
That we, Forty Martyrs, not become the subject of scorn;
Oh, You can, if You want, for You rule over all,
You, when You want, can change ice into heat and heat into ice;
Because of Your Name, the frost consumes us as an angry beast--
Oh, help us that the Name of the Almighty may be praised!
Martyrs in the lake, shackled by frost,
From heaven, by God's light, were warmed,
Gloriously they fell and remained Forty Martyrs
To the fear, horror and shame of the darkened unbelievers.

REFLECTION

Conceal your spiritual treasures and do not reveal them unnecessarily. Behold, how men conceal and hide their material wealth and how, when forced to reveal how much they have, they always conceal the greater amount and only reveal the lesser amount. Very few are the number of men who want to reveal all that they possess, and fewer still are those who would reveal more than they, in reality, possess. This, the world considers frivolous and mindless. This clearly shows you how you need to conceal your spiritual wealth, that is, your virtues, your good works, your fastings, your vigils, and your prayers. Why do not the wise children of this world reveal their material wealth? For two reasons: So that thieves would not hear of it and not to provoke the envy of evil men. There also exist envious and jealous thieves after spiritual treasure. They are the spirits of envy. As soon as you reveal your spiritual treasure, they will endeavor to belittle it and to squander it. Just as soon as you reveal it without need [let us say, out of vanity, so as to be praised], they have seized it and disparaged it; and you, O rich man of spiritual treasure, will imperceptibly and suddenly become a poor man. Many who were spiritually rich, the saints, made themselves out to be fools before the world so that by appearing foolish, they would conceal their great wisdom and strength within themselves. The Abba Isaiah writes,

"Those good works which are performed in secret are more pleasing to God." St. Nilus of Sinai says, "The covered skin of the body is white, but the uncovered skin is parched and black." So it is with our concealed and revealed good works.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in the hands of the enemies of God gathered together in the home of Caiaphas:

1. How all of them hurriedly sought false witnesses, for they wanted, by whatever means, to kill Christ;
2. How they spit in His face and struck Him on the face;
3. How our Lord endures all with unspeakable dignity and without anger.

HOMILY

-About enduring to the end-

"But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved "
(St. Matthew 24:13).

O Lord most wonderful, You have endured all, all to the end. That is why You became not only blessed but the source of blessings for all men who desire good for themselves throughout the ages of ages. The apostles endured all to the end and entered into blessed eternity. The saints willingly endured the difficulties and sufferings to the end and were glorified, both in heaven and on earth.

The martyrs willingly endured all pains to the end and became the adopted co-inheritors of the Kingdom of Christ. Every founder of a new organization recruits followers for himself with the promise of good fruits and many pleasures but deliberately remains silent about the hardships and labors which lead to those fruits and pleasures. Our Lord Jesus is the only one Who spoke the whole truth to His followers, both the bitter and the sweet side of the truth. He did not promise fruits without service, nor glory without suffering, nor ultimate rest without the thorny path, nor victory without struggle, nor pleasure without bitterness, nor the kingdom without tears and self-denial.

Although our Lord counted the many difficulties which would befall His followers, in the end He does not abandon them without comfort. He gives meaning to their sufferings and does not leave them in darkness. He says, **"The one who perseveres to the end will be saved."** What is that blessing which awaits those who endure to the end that He Jesus fully revealed and that has been witnessed even until today and is being witnessed by many saints, who, have either appeared in glory to the faithful from the other world or who, while yet in the flesh, were uplifted in the spirit to a vision of that glory and blessedness which await the faithful, the chosen and persevering?

O Lord, You are our strength. Help us to endure to the end with faith that You are beside us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 10 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR CODRATUS OF CORINTH AND OTHERS WITH HIM

During the time of the persecution of Christians, many of the faithful fled to the mountains and into the caves. So did the mother of Codratus. She was pregnant at the time and gave birth to Codratus in the forest and died shortly thereafter. Codratus was cared for by, fed by and guided by Divine Providence and by his Guardian Angel. Codratus grew up in nature and in solitude. He, who gave manna from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness, dropped from the clouds a sweet dew on the mouth of the child Codratus. When he was twelve years old, he entered into town and there some benevolent men took a liking to him and provided him with an education. He studied medicine and healed the sick, as much with natural cures and even more by the power of the spirit and prayer, which he was accustomed to since his childhood. When a new persecution arose again under Decius, Codratus was brought to trial and cast into prison. Five companions joined him and confessed the name of Christ. They were Cyprian, Dionysius, Anectus, Paul and Crescens. They were all dragged through the streets by the pagans, especially by their children. They were beaten with rods and stoned until they were eventually dragged to the scaffold. There, the martyrs prayed to God and were beheaded. On this spot a source of water gushed out of the ground which is still called Codratus even today and is a reminder of the heroic deaths of these six holy innocents for Christ. They honorably suffered for the truth in the year 250 A.D. in Corinth during the reign of Emperor Decius and his governor, Jason.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR CODRATUS OF NICOMEDIA

He was a wealthy nobleman and at the same time a staunch baptized Christian. During time of persecution when Valerian imprisoned many Christians, Codratus bribed the jailers and entered the prison bringing with him various foodstuffs for those in captivity and strengthened them in their faith. When they were brought before the judge who questioned them about their names, their homeland, and their rank, they remained silent. Then Codratus suddenly appeared behind them and cried out with a loud voice, "By name, we are Christians; servants of Jesus Christ the Lord, by title and by birth; and our city and homeland is heaven." After this declaration, he was also arrested and after prolonged and cruel torture was beheaded with the others.

3. THE VENERABLE MOTHER ANASTASIA

Anastasia was a patrician and lady of the imperial palace of Emperor Justinian. After she was widowed and when she perceived that Empress Theodora could not tolerate her, she immediately slipped out of Constantinople and turned up in the wilderness of Egypt. The renown spiritual father Abba Daniel tonsured her a nun and presented her as the monk Anastasius the eunuch according to her wishes so that, as a woman under the guise of a man, she could easily be protected and hidden from the pursuit of the emperor. Anastasia then closed herself off in a narrow cell where she spent twenty-eight years and died there in the year 563 A.D. Before her death, the Elder Daniel saw her face glow like the sun.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ANASTASIA

One time, a glorious patrician Venerable Anastasia,
Money, flattery, abandoned she all,
To Christ, her entire life she directed;
Christ, her bread; Christ, her water;
Christ, her joy and freedom,
Christ, the restorer of her soul,
Christ, the bridge over death.
Anastasia became shriveled,
The spirit through her withered face shines;
The spirit raises her higher to God,
With the spirit of God, she breathes,
Until illuminated, she became,
By Grace enlightened,
By the power of God strengthened
And among the Living inscribed.
All she forgave, all she loved,
And for the entire world, she prays,
Like an angel, she was indeed,
Wholly fixed on Christ;
By the power of God, more powerful was she
And by riches, more wealthy
Than the Empress Theodora
Amidst the opulence of the imperial court.

REFLECTION

When the forty-two Greek commanders from Ammoria were in Agaha's prison [refer to March 6], certain Muslim sages came to counsel them to embrace the faith of Mohammed and thereby receive their freedom. These sages stressed to these Christian commanders the two advantages of Islam over Christianity: **First:** Mohammed is a more recent prophet than Christ and, **Second:** the Muslims were victorious on all sides over Christianity by which God clearly points out the truth of their religion. **To the first point,** the commanders replied, "If two men are debating over a field, and one has many witnesses that the field is his and the other does not have any witnesses except his own personal statement, what do you think? Whose field is it?" To this the Agha's men replied, "By all means, the field is his who had many witnesses." To that, the commanders replied, "By yourselves you have judged in favor of Christ and against Mohammed for Christ had with Him the witnesses of all the Prophets and Apostles, but Mohammed alone witnesses to himself." **To the second point,** the commanders replied, "If you would gauge the truth of a faith by victories in wars, then this would mean that all the idolatrous nations, who from time to time have conquered the world, such as the Persians, Greeks, Romans and others, possessed the true faith. This, even you Muslims would never acknowledge. And because you have been victorious over the Christians now, this does not mean that your faith is better; rather, that our sins are greater and because of this, God punishes us, through you."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus at judgment before Caiaphas:

1. How the elders of the Jews searched everywhere for false witnesses;
2. How the witnesses testified to the contrary;
3. How our Lord listened to all the slanders and remained silent and without anger.

HOMILY

-About revealed secrets-

"Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed nor secret that will not be made known" (St. Matthew 10:26).

There is one eye, brethren, which never sleeps. That is the eye of God. There are more eyes in the heavens, brethren, than there are stars in the firmament of heaven. They are the eyes of the angels. No veil nor any wall nor darkness can conceal any kind of secret on earth from these eyes. Everything is revealed and open before the All-Seeing God and His Holy Angels. The man who believes that all the works of man can be hidden becomes a criminal. Thus thought the elders of the Jews who arranged and plotted in secrecy their evil plot against Christ the Lord. Secretly they persecuted Him; secretly they judged Him in the darkness of night; and secretly they bribed and paid false witnesses. And, as did Judas, they secretly condemned Him. Where are their secrets today? All have become revealed and open before the entire world. It is easier for man to hide from the air than from the sight of God. All the secrets of mankind, both, the good and evil, are revealed before God. A countless number of those secrets God reveals to the entire world according to His Providence. Those who can understand this truth, that God sees all and knows all, carefully guard themselves from evil thoughts in the secret of their hearts and especially from evil deeds. Whenever your heart entices you to do evil, O man, call to mind these words which are not of man but of God, **"Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed nor secret that will not be made known."** And you, whatever good you do in secret, do not become faint-hearted. All of your good is written in the heavens and will be revealed in its time.

O, All-Seeing Lord, help us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 11 -

1. SAINT SOPHRONIUS, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Sophronius was born in Damascus of distinguished parents. Having acquired worldly wisdom, he was, nevertheless, not satisfied but went to seek and acquire spiritual wisdom. In the monastery [Lavra] of St. Theodosius, he found himself in the company of a monk, John Moschus, whom he choose for his teacher, and together with him traveled about and visisted monasteries and those ascetics in Egypt who were practicing the life of asceticism. His watch word was "Each day learn more about spiritual wisdom." All that they had learned they wrote down and later published two books under the title, "**Spiritual Meadow.**" Later on, they traveled to Rome, where Moschus died leaving a testament to Sophronius to have his body taken, either to Sinai or to the Monastery of St. Theodosius. Sophronius fulfilled the desires and wishes of his teacher and translated his body to the Monastery of St. Theodosius and thereafter remained in Jerusalem which, at that time, was liberated from the Persians. He was present at the Translation of the Honorable Cross from Persia which the Emperor Heraclius carried on his shoulders into the Holy City. The aged Patriarch Zacharias, who had also returned from bondage, did not live long thereafter when he took up habitation in the other world. Patriarch Zacharias was replaced by Modestus who died in 634 A.D. Modestus was replaced by Blessed Sophronius. He governed the Church for ten years with exceptional wisdom and zeal. He rose up in defense of Orthodoxy against the heresy of Monotheletism which he condemned at his Council in Jerusalem before it was condemned at the Sixth Ecumenical Council [Constantinople, 680 A.D.]. He wrote **The Life of St. Mary the Egyptian**, complied **The Order of the Greater Blessing of Water**, and introduced several new hymns and songs in the various liturgical services. When the Arab Caliph captured Jerusalem, Sophronius begged him to spare the lives of the Christians which Omar insincerely promised. When Omar immediately began to plunder and maltreat the Christians in Jerusalem, Sophronius, with lamentation, prayed to God to take him from among the living on earth, so that he would not witness the desecration of the Holy Shrines. God heard his prayer and took Sophronius to Himself into His heavenly mansion in the year 644 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR PIONIUS AND OTHERS WITH HIM

Pionius was priest from Syria. He suffered in Smyrna during the time ofpersecution under Decius. He was condemned to be crucified, for which he was exceedingly glad. As soon as the soldiers formed a cross and laid it upon the ground, Pionius freely lay on the cross, stretched out his arms and ordered the soldiers to nail him in the hands with spikes. The cross was inserted in the ground upside down and a fire was ignited under the head of the martyr. Many people gathered around. Pionius closed his eyes and prayed to God within himself. The flames of the fire did not even catch the hairs of his head on fire. When, at last, the fire was extinguished and when everyone thought that Pionius was dead, he opened his eyes and cried out rejoicing, "O God, receive my soul," and expired. This saint wrote " The Life of St. Polycarp of Smyrna," with whom he rejoices in the Kingdom of Christ. He suffered and was glorified in the year 250 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE GREGORY SINAITES

Gregory was the abbot of Mount Sinai, a great ascetic and a just man. On the vigil of Pascha [the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ],an angel of the Lord conveyed him to Jerusalem for the Divine Services and returned him again to Sinai the same day. He died peacefully in the sixth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PIONIUS

Pionius speaks while being tortured:

**O, citizens of famous Smyrna,
Fellow townsmen of Omar, the well known,
I know that which all of you know,
Not one of you know, that, what I know:
The sweet pleasure of dying, I know
And sweeter yet, hoping in Christ.
I know that death will destroy me not
But just the body, to separate from the soul;
For me, I know that the angels are waiting
In the mansions of the Heavenly King,
And angels, prophets and saints,
Many armies of those chosen by God,
And the wonderful martyrs for Christ.
I know that I am returning to my homeland,
From whence I came here.
The goal of my suffering, I do know,
(You know not why you are torturing me!)
Seethe, O malice, and against me rage!
With outstretched arms, the Savior awaits me,
Strike me, all of you, with greater tortures.
The more difficult the suffering, the sooner the dawn,
The quicker the death, the more joyful the soul.**

REFLECTION

"No good works are accomplished by our efforts alone but by the power and will of God. Nevertheless, God demands effort on our part in conforming to His will." These are the words of Saints Barsanuphius and John. Few words but much said. We are obliged to labor, to cultivate and to prepare every good thing, and if some good will take root, grow and bring forth fruit, that is up to the power and will of God. We plow the furrows and God sows, if He wills it. We cleanse the vessels of the Spirit and God pours the Spirit into these vessels, if He wills it. He can do anything if He wills it. And He will do everything that responds to the highest wisdom and suitability, that is, to His plan of man's salvation. In interpreting the words of our Lord, **"So be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves" (St. Matthew 10:16)**, St. John Chrysostom writes that our Lord gave this commandment to His disciples that "they themselves should cooperate in some way, so that it will not appear that all effort is of Grace alone and for them not to think that they received the wreaths of glory for nothing." And so, both of them are indispensable for our salvation: our effort and the power of God's Grace.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord at judgment before Caiaphas:

1. How the High Priest of the Jews detains our Lord in his home surrounded by men almost as wretched as he himself;
2. How Peter, sitting outside in the courtyard by the fire and how before the servants, denies our Lord Jesus three times;
3. How even today, it happens that some Christians, out of fear of the world, deny the Lord in this manner: How they also purport not to be Christians; that they are not familiar with the commandments of the Lord and are not concerned about the Lord.

HOMILY

-About the second coming of Christ-

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit upon His glorious throne" (St. Matthew 25:31).

This is how our Lord spoke just before His most horrible humiliations, before being bound, before being spat upon, before being slapped, and before being ridiculed prior to His crucifixion. In His most darkest hour, He speaks about His most vivid and most glorious hour. Before His most terrible and miserable departure from this world, He speaks about His second coming in His glory. At first, He came from the cave in Bethlehem, humble and unseen, and the second time, He will come on the clouds of His angels. The first time as though He sprouted out of the earth, and the second time He will appear from the heavens. The first time He stood and knelt on the ground, and the second time He will be sitting on His throne of Glory.

When He comes again on His throne of Glory, He will not be unseen by anyone. No one will ask, as did the wise men [the Magi] before his first coming,

"Where is the King?" (St. Matthew 2:2). At this time, everyone will see the King and recognize Him as the King. But this vision and recognition will be for some, their joy and for some, their fear and terror. Just think of the joy of those who have fulfilled His commandments, those who have prayed in His Name, those who have performed good works and especially those who have suffered for His Name! Just think of the fear and terror of all those who have spat on Him, struck Him and crucified Him in Jerusalem.

O, Merciful Lord, forgive all of us who call upon Your Name and who because of our weaknesses, sin against You; forgive us before that great marvelous hour when You begin to appear in Your glory with all Your holy angels.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE THEOPHANES THE CONFESSOR

Theophanes is called the Sygrian [Sigrian] because of Sygriana [Sigriana], the place of his birth. He was a kinsman of the Emperor Leo Isaurian and his son Copronymos. He possessed great wealth and splendor. But all of this lost its worth for Theophanes when the Lord Christ began to reign in his soul. He resisted his own marriage and, when he was compelled to marry, succeeded in counseling his bride to live together in chastity, as brother and sister. As soon as his parents died, his wife entered a convent and he, a monastery. His monastery was located in the Sygrian Mountains in the Province of Cyzicus. The one-time glorious and wealthy Theophanes lived in this monastery as the least of the poor. All were amazed at the change in him. Having become renown because of his strong faith, abstinence, and wisdom, he was summoned to the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 783 A.D.] where the veneration of icons was confirmed. Because of his purity and chastity, God bestowed upon him the gift of performing miracles, by which he cured all diseases, especially maniacal disorders and insanity. He prayed to God for all the sick and the unfortunate and, through his prayers, helped them. Only when he became ill and his illness lingered for a while, did he refuse to pray to God for the restoration of his own health but endured his illness with gratitude. When the Iconoclastic persecution resumed again under the wicked Leo the Armenian, Theophanes was brought to Constantinople and cast into prison, where he languished for two years in hardships, pain and humiliation. Then the emperor banished him into exile to the island of Samothrace, which he had earlier foreseen in his spirit and had mentioned it to his jailers. After he arrived at Samothrace, he lived for twenty-three days and appeared before His Lord and Creator to receive his merited wreath of glory.

2. VENERABLE SIMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

This God-bearing and great Father of the Church was born in Galatia, Paphlagonia. Simeon was educated in Constantinople and was assigned as a courtier in attendance to the Emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Simeon left all for the sake of Christ and retreated to a monastery. He lived a life of asceticism under the direction of the Elder Simeon, after which he became the abbot of the Monastery of St. Mamas and in the end became a recluse. He is the greatest theologian after St. Gregory the Theologian. Simeon felt God's Grace in his heart. His words are true spiritual and theological revelations. He died in 1032 A.D. His relics are miracle-performing.

3. SAINT GREGORY DIALOGUES, THE POPE OF ROME

The son of Senator Gordianus and afterwards, himself, a senator and mayor of the city of Rome. As soon as his father died, Gregory surrendered himself to the spiritual life. From his wealth he built six monasteries in Sicily and the seventh in the city of Rome, in honor of St. Andrew the Apostle, in which he was tonsured a monk. Sylvia, his mother, entered a convent and was tonsured a nun. After the death of Pope Pelagius II, Gregory was chosen Pope. He fled from this honor and authority hiding himself in the mountains and ravines, but the Lord revealed him to those who were seeking him in the following manner: a fiery column appeared from the ground to heaven over the place where Gregory hid himself. He was exceptionally charitable. All of his income was used for building shelters and hospices for the needy. Often he invited less fortunate men and served them around the table. He spent his time writing beneficial [inspirational] books. He is also called Dialogues because he wrote a book under that name in which he extolled the miracles of the Italian saints. He also composed the "Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts," which is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Lenten Season. His Arch-deacon Peter saw a dove flying above Gregory's head as he was seated and writing. He presented himself before the Lord in the year 604 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THEOPHANES

Leo the Armenian offers Theophanes,
Offers riches as much as he wants,
Only his name to sign
On the evil roster of iconoclasts.
From the dungeon, Theophanes to him, writes:
O, emperor, to please you I cannot,
Neither, can I to God and to you be true.
While I was young and agreeable to the world
Immense wealth, I had,
Left all and turned to God,
Distributed all, and to the wilderness retreated,
Yet in the wilderness I did not have hunger,
By Himself, God feeds and sweetens me.
In my old age, what do you offer me?
Dust that I despised in early youth!
Nothing, O emperor, to me can you give
That the Lord does not give me a hundred-fold,
Except tortures, for which I waited so long,
From the world, tortures will separate me
And unite me with the All-Precious Lord.
O, emperor, why do you against icons, wage war?
Was not Christ Himself as an icon,
As an icon of the Eternal Hypostases,
As an icon of the Trinity Almighty,
As an icon of the unseen God,
Unseen and unapproachable.
Both you and me, will He judge,
Rule, O emperor, hope in your replacement.
The world passes, only God remains,
Whoever is with God, does not fear the world.

REFLECTION

No one, not even the Lord Himself, can easily instruct the proud. No one wants to give instructions to him who cries out that he knows everything. **"For great is the power of God; by the humble, He is glorified"** says the wise Sirach. (**The Book of Ecclesiasticus - Sirach 3:19**), David also speaks about God saying, **"He guides the humble to justice, He teaches the humble His way"** (**Psalms 25:9**). The proud person is he who wants to teach everyone and himself does not want to be taught anything by anyone. The humble is he who does not wish to teach anyone but continually desires to be taught regardless by whom. An empty spike [ear] of grain raises its head above the entire field and the full spike [ear] of grain hangs down with bowed head. O proud man, if only your Guardian Angel would somehow remove the veil from your eyes and show you the endless open sea of all that you do not know, you would kneel before every man before whom you have exhibited pride and kneel before every man whom you have belittled. You would cry out lamenting, "Forgive me, forgive me! I do not know anything!" Often times, to the humble and pious the time when they are about to die is revealed, but the death of the proud comes unexpectedly and without warning. St. Gregory Dialogues speaks of a bishop, Carpus, who daily celebrated the Divine Liturgy and how suddenly someone appeared from the other world and said, "Continue to do what you are doing in serving me and may your legs never grow tired or your hands weakened. On the feast day of the Dormition of the Mother of God [The Assumption], you will come to Me and I will give you your reward in My Heavenly Kingdom, together with all of those for whom you have prayed at the Divine Services." After a year, on the feast of the Dormition, Bishop Carpus celebrated the Divine Liturgy of God, sought forgiveness from his priests, and gave up his soul to God. His face glowed like the sun.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus before Pilate:

1. How the Jews accused Him before Pilate and how He does not say anything;
2. How He does not reply, even to Pilate's questions;
3. How our Lord speaks when it is necessary to defend men from the devil, from sin, from disease and death but is silent when it is asked that He, the Defender of Men, protect Himself from man.

HOMILY

-Again, about the second coming of Christ-

"And all the nations will be assembled before Him" (St. Matthew 25:32).

All the nations will be assembled before the Lord Jesus when He appears in His glory surrounded by Holy Angels sitting on a throne as the judge of all the living and the dead. **"All nations will be assembled,"** all, without exception. Not only the Jews who tormented Him, not only the Christians who glorified Him but also the heathen who knew Him not, nor acknowledged Him. For if He did not appear to all nations, He sent to all nations someone or He gave something for the sake of knowing God's will and for the sake of salvation. That is why all nations must appear before Him for judgment. O what an awesome and majestic spectacle when all the nations and all the tribes on earth are assembled before the Lord, Who is brighter than many suns. What joy for the holy martyrs and confessors when they see how, in this countless mass of nations, there is not one tongue left at all to deny the divinity of the Lord Jesus! But, it will not be of any value to anyone in that hour and in that place to recognize and to confess the divinity of our great Lord, if they denied Him on earth. There and then accounts will be settled, not gain nor loss. He who appears before the Lord with whatsoever, with that he will be either condemned or justified. Now is the time to acknowledge the divinity of the Lord Jesus, now, when many deny Him and when His divinity is doubted by many. They who love the Lord and who have trust in all of His words will easily acknowledge this. For when He says this, about what do they who love Him have to worry, to doubt, or to hesitate.

O Lord, Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 13 -

1. SAINT NICEPHORUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Nicephorus governed the Holy Church wisely and zealously as one of the greatest Arch-pastors of Constantinople. When Leo the Armenian rose up against icons, Nicephorus alone defied the emperor. He first counseled the emperor and then later unmasked him. That is why the depraved emperor banished him to the island of Prokenesis. On this island there was a monastery which Nicephorous had built in honor of Saint Theodore. This confessor of the Orthodox Faith remained in this monastery for thirteen years and afterwards presented himself to the Lord in the year 827 A.D. Since all the iconoclastic emperors had perished, and Michael, with his mother Theodora, sat on the Imperial Throne, Patriarch Methodius then was restored to the Patriarchal Throne. The relics of St. Nicephorous were translated from Prokenesis to Constantinople in 846 A.D. and were reposed, first in the Church of the Divine Wisdom of God [St. Sophia], from which he was banished during his life, and later reposed in the Church of the Twelve Apostles. The principal feast of this great hierarch is commemorated on June 2 and again on March 13 when the discovery and translation of his incorruptible relics is commemorated. On March 13, St. Nicephorous was banished from Constantinople and then, again, on March 13, nineteen years later, his relics were returned to the Capitol.

2. SAINT CHRISTINA THE PERSIAN

For her unwavering confession of faith in Christ, she was cruelly tortured in Persia in the fourth century. So much did they torture her, flogging her with a whip, that she became weak and died. Her soul then departed from her tortured body and entered into the joy of Christ, the King and Lord.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR, PUBLIUS

This priestly-martyr was successor to the episcopal throne of the glorious Dionysius the Areopagite in Athens. As a bishop, he was tortured by the pagans and beheaded in the second century. After a brief period of torture, he inherited life eternal.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE CITY OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Constantinople, wondrous city near the Bosphorus blue,
With your glory, whose glory can be measured?
You were an awesome battleground of spiritual warriors,
Blasphemous heretics and saints of God.
As through a sieve you sifted throughout the centuries long
And declared apostates and servants of God.
By many sins you are soiled, and by filth of sinners,
You are consecrated with the abundance of the blood of martyrs.
Who could enumerate the spiritual heroes,
And all heavenly visions and your mysteries, all?
The angels of God often swooped down upon you,
And men, as angels, to heaven were raised.
The Mother of God, many times, within you appeared,
To deliver those in danger, the sick to heal.
The flock of wonderful saints, over you, hover
And the prayers of your children, to the Most High, bear.
O, how many saints were your children!
As many as there are lilies next to lilies and saints next to saints!
History and calendar, in red, you wrote,
By your effort even the great Symbol [The Creed] was written.
And about you, in such a way, this could be said:
Among the many cities, a red letter you are.
With Holy Faith, you enlightened the universe
From paganism and heresies, the world you healed.
Tortured much, but not slain, you have not yet passed.
That is why we all celebrate you! Confessor, that you are!
Throughout the earth and in the heavens, your glory echoes;
Everyone baptized, a great gratitude owes you.

REFLECTION

Great are those Christians who have a great love for Christ. O, in truth, how great were those Christians; those God-bearing fathers and martyrs! For so many in our time, this is impossible even to imagine. This is what one of them, St. Simeon, the New Theologian, confessed before all the monks in his monastery: Speaking from his own personal experience about how the words of the Lord, **"For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (St. Matthew 11:29)**, were realized in him. Simeon said, "Believe me, when I fled to God, my Savior, I did not encounter anything sorrowful, difficult or unbearable. The only great and unbearable sorrow I had was that I could not find enough satisfactory reasons to die for the sake of the love for Christ." Are not such souls as a burning flame enclosed in earthen vessels? Burning flames are always upright, directed toward heaven. Only remove the covering and the flame will shoot upward.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus at the judgment before Herod:

1. How Herod at first was very kind because he saw Jesus not out of any spiritual need, but out of curiosity;
2. How Herod had hoped to see a miracle from Jesus, but he was fooled for the Lord remained silent to all of his questions;
3. How Herod ridiculed the Lord and how he clothed Him in a white garment.

HOMILY

-About the reconciliation of the wicked for the sake of evil-

"Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, even though they had been enemies formerly" (St. Luke 23:13).

In His shame and humiliation, the Just Man does good to His enemies. He reconciles them. It is true, in this case, that their reconciliation did not imply mutual cooperation for some good deed but mutual persecution of the Just One. At least the flame of hatred between them was extinguished and died out. That was the reward of the Just One. Pilate and Herod were enemies. On that day, when the Savior was brought for judgment, before the one and the other, they [Pilate and Herod] were reconciled. The Prince of Peace brought peace between the quarreling parties; peace which helped to hew out a cross for Him. But He also comes to be a willing sacrifice for the sins of many.

Even today common enemies make peace among themselves when they find it necessary to attack and condemn the Lord. There are many who kill one another until you mention the Name of the Lord to them. As soon as they hear that Name, they gradually make peace among themselves for the sake of attacking that Holy Name. It is easier for the unjust to tolerate the unjust than it is for them to tolerate the just. It is easier for the unjust to come to an understanding and reconciliation with the unjust than with the just.

Even in some countries, the most quarrelsome parties seek reconciliation among themselves when it is deemed necessary to decide what place should be given to the Lord Jesus Christ in the State, either to render Him the first place, which is befitting to Him, or the last place? To these questions sworn enemies reconcile among themselves in order that our Lord will be given the last place only. So, also, it was with the quarreling parties of Pharisees and Sadducees who were reconciled and entered into a partnership against Christ.

Why is it that the Most Pure and the Most Needed had to be awarded the last place? Because, according to their thinking, the first place would then be reserved for them. The same incentive was there between sworn enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees, when it was deemed necessary to seek to put Christ to death. The same incentive was the occasion that caused the reconciliation between Pilate and Herod when it was deemed necessary to judge that Christ had to be put to death.

O my brethren, let us not ever seek peace with injustice against justice. Rather, let us always seek peace with God, and that with a clear conscience.

O God, help us so that we may always possess such a peace.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 14 -

1. THE VENERABLE BENEDICT

Benedict was born in Nursia [Norcia] a province in Italy, in the year 480 A.D., of wealthy and distinguished parents. He did not remain long in school for he alone saw that because of lack of knowledge one can lose "the great understanding of his soul." He left school "an unlearned wise man and an understanding fool." He retreated to a monastery where he was tonsured by the monk Romanus after which he withdrew to a steep mountain where he remained in a cave for more than three years in a great struggle over his soul. Romanus brought him bread and lowered it down the steep mountain on a rope to the opening of the cave. When Benedict became known in the vicinity and in order to retreat from the glory of man, he withdrew from this cave. He was merciless toward himself. Once, when an unclean and raging passion of the flesh seized him, he removed all his clothes and rolled around naked in the thorns until he repelled every thought of a woman. God endowed him with many spiritual gifts: he discerned thoughts; he healed; he expelled evil spirits; he raised the dead; he appeared to some openly; and to others who were distant, he appeared in dreams. At one time, Benedict perceived that the glass of wine served to him was poisoned. When he made the sign of the cross over it, the glass burst. In the beginning he established twelve monasteries and in all of them, he placed twelve monks each. Later on, he founded the special order of the Benedictines which exists even today in the Roman Church. On the sixth day before his death, he ordered that his grave which had been prepared earlier be opened for the saint foresaw that his end was near. He assembled all the monks, counseled them and then gave up his soul to the Lord whom he had faithfully served in poverty and in purity. Scholastica, his sister by birth, lived in a convent and looking up to her brother, she greatly mortified herself and reached a high state of spiritual perfection. When St. Benedict gave up his soul, two monks, one traveling on the road and one at prayer in a far away cell, simultaneously saw the same vision. They saw a path extending from earth to heaven, covered with a precious woven fiber and illuminated on both sides by rows of men. At the head of the path, there stood a man of indescribable beauty and light who said to them that this path was prepared for Benedict, favored by God. As a result of this vision, these two brothers learned that their good abbot departed from this world. He died peacefully in the year 543 A.D. and entered into the eternal Kingdom of Christ the King.

2. SAINT EUSCHEMON, BISHOP OF LAMPSACUS

At the time of the Iconoclastic controversy Euschemon endured persecution and imprisonment. He died during the reign of Emperor Theophilus, the Iconoclast (829-842 A.D.).

3. SAINT THEOGNOSTUS

Theognostus was Metropolitan of Kiev. He was a Greek by origin and a successor to St. Peter of Kiev. He suffered much from the Mongol hordes, especially at the hands of Janibeg Khan. Theognostus was slandered by his own Russian people before the Mongolian emperor because he did not render the emperor any tribute for his episcopal rank. When the emperor summoned and questioned him concerning this, Theognostus replied: "Christ our God has redeemed this Church from paganism by His Precious Blood. For what and on what should I pay tribute to the pagans?" In the end he was released and returned home. He governed the Church for twenty-five years. He died to the Lord in the year 1353 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT BENEDICT

Benedict, a mighty-miracle-worker, was he,
A tearful devout person and a companion dear.
Led by the Spirit of God, by faith was correct,
A loving leader, mighty, resolute and humble.
Placid was his novice young;
Once, rising early, to the water Placid, he went,
At that moment holy father [Benedict] prayed to God,
But at once, his spirit perceived in the distance:
Behold, the brook suddenly rose, tumbling stones;
Placid already in death, tosses in the torrent,
The brook seized him and with him was toying,
The saint heard a scream, his own name he heard.
There, faith is necessary, but also pursuit,
Quickly, the Elder, Maurus the monk he sent.
Maurus, with a hurried leap, in the water jumped,
On the water as on a road, to Placid he rushed
And Maurus unaware, that on the water he was walking,
[The] prayers of the saint upheld him on the surface.
When Maurus and Placid to the elder came,
Kissed the elder's hand and Placid sobbed:
I saw you, O elder, above my head,
When my heart was overly-filled with dread
By the hairs you grabbed me and above the water lifted me
Until, in that moment, Maurus to my assistance came!
Through the prayers of Holy Father Benedict,
God, also proclaimed Maurus as a miracle-worker.

REFLECTION

We can hardly find a better example as to how we should not become lazy and how we should not procrastinate in prayer and in work for tomorrow's day than by this example which is given to us by St. Ephrem the Syrian. "Once a brother was inspired by the devil to think: Give yourself rest today and tomorrow rise for vigil." But he answered the thought, "Who knows, perhaps, I will not even get up tomorrow, that is why I need to rise today." Before work, he was also inspired with this thought, "Give yourself rest today and complete your work tomorrow." And again he responded, "No, I will complete my work today and about tomorrow's day, the Lord will take care of it." St. Anthony teaches, " Before the closing of each day, arrange your life as though this is your last day on earth and you will protect yourself from sins."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus before Pilate:

1. How the Lord is silent before Pilate;
2. How Judas, at that time, threw the pieces of silver into the Temple and hanged himself;
3. And again, how Pilate questions and the Lord is silent.

HOMILY

-About Christ's prophecy concerning His Glory-

"From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven"(St. Matthew 26:24).

He who does not see God as the merciful Samaritan on earth will see Him as the Dreadful Judge in Heaven. So blinded were the leaders of the Jews that they were unable to see in Christ the Lord neither God, nor the Messiah, nor a Prophet, nor even a simple good man. They placed Him beneath ordinary good people. Not only that, they placed Him even lower than the thieves. They released Barabas and they condemned Christ! In general, they did not even consider Christ a man. They spit upon Him; they mocked Him; they made a masquerade of Him, as some cheap and unneeded thing. Exactly at that moment when the Jews maliciously played with Christ as some cheap and unneeded thing, the Lord suddenly opened His mouth and spoke, **"From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of Heaven."** What a distance there is between what Christ is in truth and that which the Jews held Him to be!

The Son of Man, Who sits on the right hand of Power, is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was seen as such soon after that by the Holy Arch-Deacon Stephen and many many others. The Son of Man Who comes on the clouds with angels and countless numbers of powers and heavenly hosts is again that same Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, as He was seen in His Revelation, written by St. John, the Theologian and Evangelist.

O my brethren, do not be misled by deluding and illusionary tales of those men who speak, "When we see Christ in the Heavens as God, then we will believe in Him." That faith will be a little too late, and in vain will that vision be. With our faith we must see Christ as God in that humiliated, spat upon, beaten, bloodied, and ridiculed man; in that silent and condemned One in the court of Caiaphas Whom the Jews considered as something cheap and unneeded and Whom they turned into a masquerade. This is the Faith that is valued in the heavens. This is the Faith that is rewarded by resurrection and immortality. This is the Faith which, until now, nurtured and transplanted to heaven numerous armies of the holiest souls, of the strongest characters, the most forbearing heroes and the most illustrious minds.

O humiliated Lord, raise us up to this Faith.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 15 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR AGAPIUS AND THE SEVEN WITH HIM: PUBLIUS, TIMOLAUS, ROMULUS, ALEXANDER, ALEXANDER, DIONYSIUS AND DIONYSIUS

They all suffered in Caesarea in Palestine at the hand of Prince Urban during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. All seven were extremely young men, none of whom were Christians, except Agapius. Neither were they baptized with water, but theirs was a "baptism by blood." One day these seven young men were observing how Christians were being tortured; one in the fire, another on the gallows and a third before wild beasts. Seeing with what great forbearance these Christians endured all pain and sufferings, these seven became inflamed with a zeal for Christ. They tied their hands behind their backs and came before Urban saying, "We also are Christians." The flattery and threats of Urban remained, but in vain. These young men were joined by a distinguished citizen of this town, Agapius, who, until then, had suffered much for Christ. They became all the more enflamed in their faith and love for the Lord. All were beheaded in the year 303 A.D. and took up their abode in the mansions of the Heavenly King.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ALEXANDER

Alexander was from the city of Side in Pamphylia. A deputy of the Emperor Aurelius asked Alexander, "Who are you and what are you?" To that, Alexander replied that, he is a shepherd of the flock of Christ." "And where is this flock of Christ?," further inquired the wicked and suspicious governor. Alexander replied, "Throughout the entire world where men live whom Christ the God created, and among those who believe in Him, they are His sheep. But all who are fallen away from their Creator and are slaves to creation, to man-made things and to dead idols, such as you, are estranged from His flock. At the dreadful judgment of God, they will be placed on the left with the goats." The wicked judge then ordered that Alexander, first of all, be beaten with oxen straps and then thrown into a fiery furnace. But the fire did not harm him in any way. After that, he was skinned and was thrown to the wild beasts, but the beasts would not touch him. Finally, the deputy ordered that Alexander be beheaded. Just as soon as the judge pronounced the sentence, he became possessed by an evil spirit and went insane. Howling, the judge was led before his god-idol and on the way, his evil soul was wrenched from him. St. Alexander suffered between the years 270 - 275 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR NICANDER, THE EGYPTIAN

Nicander was skinned and then beheaded for his faith in Christ. As a physician, his crime was that he ministered to Christian martyrs and honorably buried their martyred bodies. He suffered honorably in the year 302 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS AGAPIUS, ALEXANDER AND NICANDER

From every state, the Lord chooses His army,
Everyone in whom the flame of love and faith burns;
From among physicians, sages, peasants and laborers,
From among emperors and fishermen--an army of martyrs!
The sword beheaded, the Lord received the wise Alexander,
The sword beheaded, the Lord took the merciful Nicander,
The sword beheaded eight beautiful and young apples,
Beneath the sword, the All-sustaining Hand receives them.
Those whom the world from its sheepfold scoops up and discards
With His tender hand, the Lord gathers as the most beautiful blossoms.
Shoveled aside as a weed, the first citizen
Agapius, the Lord, as His son, received.
Ten martyrs and glorious men
Now, sing in eternity in the angelic choir.
It is not the same to die, to die, although for what:
Some of the dead are blessed and others cursed.
Who dies for Christ's sake, with him is blessing,
Who dies persecuting Christ, curse is with him.

RELECTION

Love for whomever or for whatever, even love for oneself can, in time, grow cold in man, can be lost altogether and can even be twisted into hatred. But the love of man for God, once gained and established, is more difficult to cool off, except if one loses his mind. **In the first instance** man diminishes or erases his love either out of change in himself or because of a change in the objects of his love. **In the second instance** man can diminish his love toward God only because of a change in him and never because of a change in God. All of this is neatly and clearly explained by St. Isaac the Syrian saying, "There is a kind of love that is similar to a brook following a rainfall which quickly ceases after the rain stops. But there is a love similar to a spring which erupts through the earth, which never ceases. **The first love is humanlove, and the second love is Divine Love.**" St. Simeon the New Theologian, speaks about Divine Love, "O Holy Love! You are the end of the Law. You overcome me; You warm me; You inflame my heart to immeasurable love for God and my brothers. Out of love, God became man. Out of love, He endured all His life-giving suffering in order to deliver man from the throes of Hades and bring him to heaven. Out of love, the apostles completed their difficult course. Out of love, the martyrs shed their blood in order not to lose Christ."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus when Pilate brought Him out before the Jews:

1. How the Lord was flogged by the Roman soldiers;
2. How after flagellation, He was mocked by them; they placed a thorny crown upon His head and dressed Him in a purple robe;
3. How Pilate presents Him to the Jews saying, "**Behold the man!**" (St. John 19:5).

HOMILY

-About the prophecy concerning the desolate house-

"Behold, your house will be abandoned, desolate"(St. Matthew 23:38).

Why did our Lord remain silent at the judgment before the Jews and before Pilate? Because, prior to that, He had said everything that needed to be said. He said and foretold how the Jewish elders would hand him over to the unbelievers and how they would kill Him. Many times He had foretold what would personally befall Him. This, His apostles heard and carefully remembered. He also foretold His terrible punishment which the Jews will assume upon themselves by their evil abomination against the Son of God. Even the Jews heard this and forgot it. **"Behold, your house will be abandoned, desolate."** The Lord foretold this about the Jews. And this, the Jews heard and forgot. But much later, many remembered these prophetic words, many of whom had participated in the Great Evil when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, plundered it, set it on fire, dispersed its inhabitants and displaced them throughout the world. Many were killed either by suffocation, by starvation or by crucifixion on a cross. The Jews, out of fear and annoyance, forced Pilate to raise his hand against the Lord Jesus. Afterwards, the Roman Empire raised its hand against the Jews. On that day when the prophecy of the Lord was fulfilled, the Roman Empire, represented in Jerusalem at one time by Pilate, raised its hand against Jerusalem and their children with a very sharp sword. When Emperor Hadrian restored Jerusalem, he renamed it (Aelia Capitolina)(*) and forbade the Jews from settling in Jerusalem under penalty of death. **"Behold, your house will be abandoned, desolate."** From that time on, until today, Jerusalem was left deserted by the Jews as a people (nation). The children of the wicked ancestors who killed Christ were dispersed everywhere, even to this day, but in their own home.(**)

Lord, Almighty and All-Seeing, forgive us our sins.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

(*) Hadrian renamed Jerusalem Aelia after his name, for his was called Aelius.

(**)Nota Bene: The State of Israel was established May 14, 1948.

MARCH - 16 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE ARISTOBULUS, ONE OF THE SEVENTY APOSTLES

Born in Cyprus, Aristobulus was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas. He followed the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans saying, "**Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus**" (**Romans 16:10**). When the great apostle appointed many bishops throughout the various parts of the world, he appointed Aristobulus as bishop for the British, that is, England. In Britain the people were savages, heathen and wicked. Aristobulus endured many indescribable tortures, misfortunes and evil among them. They struck and beat him mercilessly, dragged him about the streets, ridiculed and mocked him. Finally this holy man succeeded by the power of the Grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptized them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and, in the end, died there peacefully and entered into the Kingdom of the Lord, Whom he faithfully served. (*)

(*) In the Greek Synaxarion the Venerable Christodulos is also mentioned on this day. He lived a life of asceticism on the island of Patmos, where he build a monastery dedicated to St. John the Theologian. He died in the year 1111 A.D. Many miracles occured over his relics.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR SABINUS

Sabinus was a Syrian from the city of Hermopolis and an official of that city. At the time of a persecution against the Christians, he withdrew to a mountain with a large number of other Christians and closed himself off in a hut, where he spent his time in fasting and prayer. A certain beggar, who brought him food and for whom Sabinus performed a good deed, reported him. As did Judas to Christ, so also, this unfortunate one betrayed his benefactor for two pieces of gold. Sabinus, with six others, were apprehended, bound by the soldiers and brought to stand trial. After great and enormous pains he was cast into the Nile river where he gave up his soul to God in the year 287.A.D.

3. THE PRIEST-MARTYRS TROPHIMUS AND THALLUS

They were born in Syria and were brothers by birth. They openly and freely preached Christ and denounced the folly of the Hellenes [Greeks] and Romans. The enraged pagans decided to have them stoned to death, but when they began hurling stones upon these two holy brothers, the stones reverted and struck the assailants and the brothers remained unharmed. Afterward they were both crucified. From their crosses the brothers taught and encouraged those Christians who stood sorrowfully around. After much agony they presented their souls to the Lord to Whom they remained faithful to the end. They suffered honorably in the year 300 A.D., in the city of Bofor.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS TROPHIMUS AND THALLUS

Two blood-brothers imbued by the Spirit,
Illumined and regenerated by faith,
These two brothers, on the Cross crucified,
Counseled the masses of right-believing people:
O, brethren, why upon us, from below, do you gaze?
Because of our difficult sufferings, do not, bitterly weep!
Christ our Savior, Doer of heroic deeds,
Because of such sufferings, the Redeemer, He became,
The Redeemer of the entire human race,
Listening to Him, we are being saved.
He obeyed the Father, and to the earth descended,
Suffered and resurrected, into Heaven ascended.
To Him we harken and sufferings endure,
Through sufferings, into His kingdom we walk.
Fear not brethren, neither fire nor sword,
The justice of Christ, than the entire world is stronger.
Fear not brethren, nor for yourself feel sorrow,
For eternal salvation, deny yourself.
All sufferings are small, trivial and bearable,
Compared to the rewards of Paradise, eternal and sublime.
The world, a false mask, is an insane illusion,
Eternity, that is our true homeland.
Give the world to those who love the lie of the world,
And because of lies, they forfeit life and truth,
You, seize the pearl above the mud of the world -
Harken, brethren, to Trophimus and Thallus!

REFLECTION

If we fulfill the law of God in our thoughts, how much easier would it be then for us to fulfill it in our deeds? That is, if we do not transgress the law of God in our thoughts, how much easier would it be not to transgress it in our deeds? Or still, if our hearts, tongues, hands and feet are with God, then our entire body cannot be against God. Heart, heart, prepare your heart for God. Consecrate it to God; worship God; fulfill the law of God in it; unite it with God; and all the rest will follow and will be governed by the heart. It is not he who holds the spoke of the wheel that steers the wheel, but he who holds its axis. The heart is the axis of our being. Speaking about the commandments of God, the Venerable Hesychius says, "If you compel yourself to fulfill them in your thought, then you will rarely have the need to strain yourself to fulfill them in deed." That is, if you set your hearts on God, as on an axis, then the wheels will easily and comfortably follow the axis. In other words all of man will follow after his own heart. **"Your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:9)**, says the all-wise David.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus how He walks under the cross to Golgotha:

1. How He quietly and patiently carries His cross;
2. How they took the cross from Him and gave it to Simon of Cyrene; how he carried the cross walking after Christ;
3. How He glanced at the women of Jerusalem, who were weeping, and said to them: **"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me: weep instead for yourselves and for your children" (St. Luke 23:28)**, declaring by this His victory and defeat over His murderers.

HOMILY

-About the reproach of Christ as wealth-

"By faith Moses considered the reproach than the treasures of Egypt, for he was of the Anointed One greater wealth looking to the recompense" (Hebrews 11: 24-26).

Moses did not want to remain in the palace of the pharaoh nor to be called the adopted son of pharaoh. Desiring more, **"He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin" (Hebrews 11:25)**. How different was Moses from his descendants [The Jews], who out of pharonic reasons, condemned the King of Glory to death! All of them would have liked to live one more year in the decaying court of the pharaoh rather than to travel with God for forty years in the wilderness. Moses left all honors, all riches and all vanities, which only the wealth of Egypt could provide. At the command of God, Moses started out through the hungry and thirsty wilderness with faith that beyond there lay the Promised Land. All of this also means to hold the **"reproach of the Anointed One [Christ]"** above all the wealth of Egypt.

The **"reproach of the Anointed One [Christ]"** is that which the men of this world with a powerful stench of the earth, are ashamed in Christ. That is Christ's poverty on earth, His fasting, His vigil, His prayer, His wandering without a roof over His head, His condemnation, His humiliation, and His shameful death. This **"reproach of the Anointed One [Christ]"** was valued by the apostles, and after them, by countless saints, who thought this to be of greater wealth than all the riches in the entire world. Following these indignities, the Lord resurrected and opened the gates of heaven and revealed the Promised Land of Paradise, into which He led mankind along the path of His reproach or the wilderness of His suffering.

O Lord, glorified and resurrected, help us that we may hold unwaveringly every drop of Your sweat and Your blood as a treasure greater than all worldly riches.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH -17-

1. SAINT ALEXIS, THE MAN OF GOD

Varied are the paths upon which God leads those who desire to please Him and to fulfill His Law. There lived in Rome at the time of Emperor Honorius a high-ranking dignitary, Euphemian, who was highly respected and extremely wealthy. He and his wife, Algae, led a God-pleasing life. Even though he was wealthy, Euphemian sat at the table once a day, only after the setting of the sun. He had an only son, Alexis, who, when he had reached the age of maturity, was compelled to marry. But on that same night, he left not only his wife but the home of his father as well. Alexis boarded a boat and arrived at the city of Edessa in Mesopotamia, where there was a renown image of our Lord, sent there by our Lord Himself to Emperor Abgar. Having venerated this image, Alexis clothed himself in the dress of a beggar and, as such, lived in the city for seventeen years, continually praying to God in the vestibule of the Church of the Holy Mother of God. When it became public that he was a man of God, he became frightened of the praise of men, departed Edessa and boarded a boat and traveled to Laodicea. According to God's Providence, the boat was carried away and sailed all the way to Rome. Considering this to be the finger of God, Alexis decided to go to the house of his father and there, as an unknown, continued his life of self-denial. His father did not recognize him but out of charity allowed him to live in his courtyard in a hut. Alexis remained here for seventeen years living only on bread and water. Mistreated by the servants in various ways, he endured all to the end. When his end approached, he wrote a letter, clenched it in his hand, laid down and died on March 17, 411 A.D. At the same time there was a revelation in the Church of the Twelve Apostles, and in the presence of the emperor and the patriarch, a voice was heard which said, "Seek out the Man of God." Shortly after that, it was revealed that this Man of God resided at the house of Euphemian. The emperor along with the pope and an entire retinue arrived at the home of Euphemian and after a lengthy discussion learned that the beggar was that "Man of God." When they entered his hut, they found Alexis dead but his face shown as the sun. From that letter his parents learned that it was their son Alexis. Also, his bride, who for 34 years lived without him, learned that he was her husband. All were overcome with immense grief and pain. Later, they were comforted after seeing how God glorified His chosen one. By touching his body, many of the sick were healed, and from his body flowed a sweet-smelling oil [Chrism]. His body was buried in a sarcophagus of marble and jasper. His head reposes in the Church of St. Laurus in the Peloponnese.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR MARINUS

Marinus was a soldier. Not only did he not want to offer sacrifices to the idols, but if others made sacrifices, he scattered and trampled them under his feet. As a result of this, Marinus was tortured and beheaded in the third century. A certain Senator, Astyrius, clothed in a priceless white garment witnessed the suffering of St. Marinus. Astyrius was so overcome with enthusiasm for the Faith of Christ, Who gives to His followers so much courage, that he placed the martyred body on his shoulders, removed it and buried it with honors. Upon seeing this, the pagans murdered him also as a Christian.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ALEXIS, THE MAN OF GOD

Alexis abandoned all that the world deems glorious,
And to God, he embarked on the narrow, but true path.
First, decided he, to become impoverished for the sake of Christ,
After that, he hurriedly left the opulence of his parents.
And when he departed to a distant land and when he returned
Neither in splendor nor in poverty did he stumble into sin.
The mind raised to God, -- as a lighted candle he held,
With a strong faith and prayer that moves mountains.
Sorrowful mother, inconsolable, mother Algae,
Euphemian, aged father, sorrows and sobs,
And the bride, at one time young, faded because of grief.
One day, the servants at the beggar screamed,
And who this withered beggar is, no one even suspects.
The heir of that household, that is he! But about that, he remains silent.
Inheritance he disowned while in early bloom
In order to be a co-heir in the heavenly world.
But the saint was unable to hide, the Lord makes known the saint,
Who by his life glorifies God, God glorifies him.
Alexis glorifies God, that is why glorious he became,
In truth, he was and remained the Man of God.

REFLECTION

Why are we here on earth? To show our love for God. To learn to love God more than sin. That by our inconsequential love, we may respond to the greater love of God. Only God's love is a great love and our love is always inconsequential. God abundantly showed and shows His love for man both in Paradise and on earth. This brief earthly life is given to us as a school and as an examination to question ourselves as to whether we will respond with love to the great love of God. "Every day and every hour, proof of our love for God is required of us," says St. Isaac the Syrian. God shows His love for us every day and every hour. Every day and every moment we stand positioned between God and sin. We have either to give our love to God and elevate ourselves among the angels or to choose sin and fall into the gloom of Hades. Alexis, the Man of God, loved God more than he loved his parents, his wife and riches. He spent seventeen years as a beggar far away from the home of his parents, and another seventeen years Alexis spent as an unknown and scorned in the house of his parents. He did this, all for the sake of the love of God. The merciful God responded love for love for these thirty-four years of suffering. He gave Alexis eternal life and joy among His angels in the heavens and glory on earth.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus on Golgotha:

1. How the soldiers removed His garments and He remains silent and does not defend Himself;
2. How they nailed Him to the wood with spikes and He remains silent and does not defend Himself;
3. How with uproar and tumult, they raised the cross from the ground, placed it upright and the Lord remains silent.

HOMILY

-About the second coming of Christ-

"For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man" (St. Matthew 24:27).

The second advent of our Lord Jesus will be a coming in glory. Our Lord repeated this many times. Here He tells us in more detail as to what this, His coming, will resemble. He says it will resemble lightning. Through this He reveals the five characteristics of His glorious advent.

First: His second coming will be unexpected, like lightning. That is why He reminded us, **"Therefore, stay awake! For you know neither the day nor the hour" (St. Matthew 25:13).**

Second: His second coming will be as bright as lightning. The sun and the stars will be darkened. The entire universe will lose the glow of its face when He shines. He, who sins, will have less light and brightness. How much darker will the sinner be under this heavenly flame. That is why He reminded us to hold the lamps of our souls filled with oil and readiness. O my brethren, let us not find ourselves in the darkness in that terrible hour!

Third: His advent will be as powerful as lightning. For He, alone, spoke to others saying that He will come **"with great power and glory" (St. Matthew 13:26).**

Fourth: His coming will be all encompassing and public to everyone and all, from east to west. That is, He will not appear as the first time to be seen only by His disciples or only one people or one nation or one country or one state but He will appear like lightning which all nations and all peoples on earth will see at once.

Fifth: Just as the lightning precedes rain and hail, so shall His second coming precede the dreadful judgment which will be for the righteous and faithful like the desired rain; and for the unrighteous and unfaithful, like hail. Let us make preparation, my brethren, for the clouds are gathering and the divine lightning may descend from them at any time.

O Lord, Great and Awesome, give oil to the lamps of our souls so that we will not find ourselves in eternal darkness when Your eternal light appears.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 18 -

1. SAINT CYRIL, ARCHBISHOP OF JERUSALEM

Cyril was born in Jerusalem during the reign of Constantine the Great and died during the reign of Theodosius the Great [315-386 A.D.] He was ordained a priest in 346 A.D. and succeeded to the throne of Blessed Maximus, Patriarch of Jerusalem in 350 A.D. On three occasions he was dethroned and banished into exile until finally, during the reign of Theodosius, he was restored and lived peacefully for eight years and then gave up his soul to the Lord. He underwent two difficult struggles: one, against the Arians, who became powerful under Constantius, the son of Constantine, and the other during the reign of Julian the Apostate [this turncoat] and with the Jews. At the time of the dominance of the Arians and on the Day of Pentecost, a sign of the cross, brighter than the sun, appeared which stretched over Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives and lasted for several hours from the ninth hour in the morning. Concerning this phenomenon, seen by all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a report was written to Emperor Constantius which served much in establishing Orthodoxy against the heretics. During the time of the Apostate, still another sign occurred. In order to humiliate the Christians Julian persuaded the Jews to restore the Temple of Solomon. Cyril prayed to God that this not happen. There was a terrible earthquake which destroyed all that had been newly built. Then the Jews began restoration anew. Again, there was an earthquake which destroyed not only the newly constructed portion but overturned and scattered the old stones beneath the ground which supported the Temple. And so the words of the Lord came true that **"there will not be left here a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down"** (St. Matthew 13:2 - St. Luke 2:6). Among the many writings of this holy father is his **Catechetical Discourses**, a first class work preserved to the present which confirms the faith and practice of Orthodoxy. This saint was a unique arch-pastor and a great ascetic. He was meek and humble, exhausted from fasting, and pallid. After a life of many labors and noble struggles for the Orthodox Faith, Cyril peacefully died and took up habitation in the eternal court of the Lord.

2. ANINUS, THE WONDER-WORKER

Aninus was born in Chalcedon. He was of short stature as was Zacchaeus of old but great in spirit and faith. He withdrew from the world in his fifteenth year and settled in a hut near the Euphrates river where he prayed to God and atoned for his sins, at first with his teacher Mayum and, after his death, alone. Through the power of his prayers, he replenished a dry well with water, healed the sick of various maladies and tamed wild beasts. A trained lion accompanied him and was at his service at all times. He discerned the future. When Pionius, a stylite, was attacked and badly beaten by robbers some distance away from Aninus, Pionius decided to descend from the pillar and proceed to complain to the judges. St. Aninus "discerned the soul" of this stylite and his intention. He sent a letter to Pionius, by his lion, counseling him to abandon his intention, to forgive his assailants and to continue in his asceticism. His charity was inexpressible. The bishop of Neo-Caesarea presented him with a donkey in order to ease the burden of carrying water from the river, but he gave the donkey to a needy man who had complained to him about his poverty. The bishop presented him with another donkey and he gave that one away. Finally, the bishop gave him a third donkey, not only to serve as a water-carrier but one that Aninus was to care for and to return. Before his death Aninus saw Moses, Aaron and Or [Egyptian Ascetic] approaching him, and they called out to him, "Aninus, the Lord is calling you, arise and come with us." He revealed this to his disciples and gave up his soul to the Lord, Whom he faithfully served. He was one-hundred ten years old when his earthly life was ended.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

A large sanctuary light glows before the Altar,
And a small sanctuary light with a smaller flame,
But one and the other gives off the same light
And before the same God, they shine with a glow.
Both, great saints and lesser saints
With the same flame of Christ set on fire.
Among the great saints, a large sanctuary lamp,
Holy Church numbers Saint Cyril.
The Faith, he explained and confirmed,
Whatever he said in words, he confirmed by his life.
His word was of the Holy Spirit,
And his life, a reflection of the flame of heaven.
Arius he shamed and Julian he crushed,
And to many ailing souls he was a balm.
From word to word, he believed Christ
Therefore his word resounds as gold;
And continues today, the weak and those of little faith,
He encourages and makes joyful the right-believers in Christ.
That is why the Church glorifies and honors Cyril,
Throughout the centuries, the name of Cyril echoes.

REFLECTION

There are many vindictive people who think that time brought greatness to Christ, and how, in the early centuries of Christianity, the Lord was not thought of as highly as He was thought of in later times. Nothing is easier than to squelch this untruth. Here is the way St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes about the Lord Christ, "This is He Who is and He Who was, [He Is] consubstantial with the Father, [He Is] the Only-Begotten, [He Is] equally enthroned, [He Is] equal in power, [He Is] Almighty, [He Is] without beginning, [He Is] uncreated, [He Is] unchangeable, [He Is] indescribable, [He Is] invisible, [He Is] inexpressible, [He Is] incomprehensible, [He Is] immeasurable, [He Is] unfathomable, [He Is] uncircumscribed. He is the **"brightness of His [Father's] Glory" (Hebrews 1:13)**. He is the Creator [Author] of the substance of all things created. He is the Light of Light, shining from the bosom of the Father. He is God of gods **"that such is God, Our God forever and ever" (Psalm 48:15)**, and God of God who gives us knowledge of Himself. He is the Fountain of Life **"For with you is the Fountain of our life" (Psalm 36:9)**, flowing from the Father's Fountain of life. He is the River of God; **"There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God" (Psalm 46:4)**, **"The river of God is full of water" (Psalm 65:9)** Who comes forth from the infinity of God but is not separated from Him. He is the Treasury of the Father's good gifts and endless blessings. He is the Living Water that gives life to the world. **"But whoever drinks the water I shall give you will never thirst; the water I shall give you will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (St. John 4:14)**. He is the uncreated light that is begotten but not separated from the First Sun. He is God the Word [Logos]; **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (St. John 1:1)**, Who with one word [He] brought forth all things from non-existence into being. **"All things came to be through Him, and without Him nothing came to be" (St. John 1:3)**. This is He Who created us in the image of God and has now made Himself man in our image, but at the same time God. Even today, after sixteen centuries since this Confession of Faith was written, the Orthodox Church adheres to this same Faith, word for word and letter for letter.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus mocked on the cross:

1. How they write this scorn above his head, **"King of the Jews" St. Matthew 27:37 - St. Mark 15:27 - St. Luke 23:38**;
2. How those passing by scorned Him, shaking their heads and reviling Him;
3. How even the thief on the cross reviles Him;
4. How even throughout the centuries the persecutors of the Christians scorn Him.

HOMILY

-About the King who does not wish to defend Himself with an army-

"Do you think that I cannot call upon My Father and He will not provide Me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels" (St. Matthew 26:53).

Thus spoke the Lord to the disciple who drew the sword to defend his Teacher in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is obvious from these words that the Lord could have defended Himself, if He wanted to, not only from Judas and his company of guards, but also from Pilate and the leaders of the Jews. For the might of one angel is greater than the greatest army of men, much less the might of twelve legions of angels.

The Lord did not want to seek this help from the Father. In His prayer in Gethsemane, He said to His Father, **"Let Your will be done" (St. Matthew 26:42)**. With that, He immediately knew the Will of the Father and that it was necessary that He be given over to suffering. He was in agreement with the Will of His Father and set out on the path of suffering. It was necessary to allow the background to be portrayed gloomier in order that the resurrection would be brighter. It was necessary to allow evil to compete as much as it could so that, afterwards, it would explode and disintegrate into nothing. It was necessary to allow evil to cry aloud so that, soon after, it would become speechless before the miraculous resurrection. It was necessary that all the wicked deeds of men against God be manifested so that they would be able to see and appraise the love and mercy of God toward mankind. The angels of God were not sent to defend Christ from the Jews; rather, the angels of God were sent, after three days, to announce the holy resurrection of Christ.

O Lord, All-Powerful and All-Merciful, have mercy on us and save us!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 19 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS CHRYSANTHUS AND DARIA AND THE OTHERS WITH THEM

Chrysanthus was the only son of Polemius, a distinguished patrician, who settled in Rome from Alexandria. As the son of wealthy parents, Chrysanthus studied all the secular subjects, having the most learned men for instructors. But secular wisdom confused him and left him in uncertainty as to what is truth. As a result of this, he grieved. But God, who plans all and everything, alleviated his grief. A written copy of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles came into the hands of the young Chrysanthus. Having read them, Chrysanthus was enlightened with the truth, and he desired a teacher and found one in the person of a certain priest, Carpophorus, who taught and baptized him. This did not please his father, who attempted everything in order to dissuade him from believing in Christ. Not succeeding, the wicked father at first tried to corrupt him by placing him alone with an immoral woman. In this, Chrysanthus was victorious over himself and persevered in chastity. His father then coerced him into marrying Daria, a pagan girl. Chrysanthus counseled Daria to embrace the Faith in Christ and to live together as brother and sister, although pretending to be married. When his father died, Chrysanthus began to confess Christ openly and to live as a Christian, both he and his entire household. During the reign of Emperor Numerian, he and Daria were cruelly tortured for their faith. Even the torturer Claudius, witnessing the forbearance of these honorable martyrs and the miracles which were manifested during their agony, embraced the Faith of Christ along with his entire household. For this, Claudius was drowned. Both of his sons were beheaded. His wife, after having recited her prayers, died on the gallows. Daria was so steadfast in her agony that the pagans cried out, "Daria is a goddess!" Finally, it was decreed that Chrysanthus and Daria be buried in a deep pit and covered with stones. Later, a church was erected on this site. There was a cave near this pit where some Christians assembled for prayer and Communion in memory of the Saints Chrysanthus and Daria. Hearing of this, the pagans attacked and sealed off this cave. By such a death, the pagans drove these Christians from this world to a better world where Christ reigns eternally. These glorious martyrs, Chrysanthus and Daria and the others with them, among whom were Diodorus the priest and Marianus the deacon, suffered for Christ in Rome in the year 284 A.D.,

2. THE HOLY MARTYR PANCHARIUS

Pancharius was born in Villach, Germany [present day Austria]. He was a high-ranking officer at the court of Diocletian and Maximian. At first, he denied Christ but, being counseled by his mother and sister, he returned to the Faith of Christ and died for it in the year 302 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS CHRYSANTHUS AND DARIA

Saint Chrysanthus counsels Daria,

O virgin, forsake the lie

And do not venerate the idols as gods;

Neither seek, you, truth from the world.

The truth is in the One God,

The One Triune God

Who created the heavenly armies

Of angels and heavenly powers;

Who created the whole universe,

And of the universe, man, the crown.

The only One, immortal and living,

He, out of the earth, creates wrappings

And the clothing of spiritual wealth.

Our soul is spiritual wealth

Wrapped up in the dust of the body.

The soul should be tenderly nurtured

As a bride to make ready for Christ.

Forsake, O virgin, the bodily,

It leads to suffering and sorrow.

God does not look into the vessel of the flesh

But at the flower which grows in it.

O virgin, clothed in death

Today, tomorrow consumed by death:

Adorn your soul with the flower of virtues,

Sow the flower with faith in the Lord,

Enclose it with hope and love,

Water it with the Life-creating Spirit,

Weed it of the weeds of sins,

Let grow the flower of virtues,

Let grow the flower of piety,

Let grow the flower of charity,

Let grow the flower of repentance,

Let grow the flower of patience,

Let grow the flower of abstinence,

Let grow the flower of obedience.

As a hymn of Paradise, your soul is,

Let it smell like a garden in May.

And may God to dwell therein,

For which He created it.

Daria listened to Chrysanthus,

Her soul to Christ she wedded,

Her body to torture she submitted

With Chrysanthus, her spiritual brother.

And God transplanted them to Paradise,

With them, adorned the garden of Paradise.

REFLECTION

"That mercy [of God] that resurrects us and against which we sin later on is even greater than that mercy that He bestowed upon us before He gave us being; when we did not exist. Glory O Lord to Your immeasurable mercy!" Thus speaks St. Isaac the Syrian. He wants to say that greater is the mercy that God showed toward us when, through Christ, He saved us from the corruption of sin and death than when He created us out of nothing. Truly, it is so. Even our earthly parents show greater mercy to the perverted and fallen son when they embrace him again, forgive him all, make him civilized, cleanse him, heal him and again make him their heir then, when they gave him birth.

When the young Pancharius, surrounded by royal honors, denied Christ, his mother wrote him a letter full of pain and sorrow. "Do not be afraid of men," wrote his mother, "but it is essential to fear God's judgment. You should have confessed your faith in Christ before emperors and lords and not to have denied Him. Remember His words: **'But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before My heavenly Father'** " (St. Matthew 10:33). Being ashamed of himself, the son accepts the advice of his mother, confessed his faith in Christ before the emperor, and died a martyr's death for Christ in order to live with Him eternally. And so the blessed mother of Pancharius brought about a new birth for her son, a spiritual birth more important than the first, physical birth.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus on the cross:

1. How He suffered in agony on the cross;
2. How He was given vinegar and gall to drink when He said He was thirsty;
3. How those men beneath the cross, insensitive because of selfishness, did not think about Him but were vying for his garments.

HOMILY

-About the sign of the Son of Man-

"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens"(St. Matthew 24:30).

What kind of sign will the sign of the Son of Man be, which once had been shown briefly? That is the cross, more brighter than the sun, which manifested itself over Jerusalem before the coming of an earlier personification of the Antichrist by the name of Julian the Apostate. And in lieu of every homily concerning this miraculous sign, it is worthwhile to quote here the letter of St. Cyril of Jerusalem written to Emperor Constans, the son of Constantine the Great and predecessor of Julian the Apostate. A portion of his letter reads, "For in these very days of the holy feast of Pentecost on the Nones of May, about the third hour, a gigantic cross formed of light appeared in the sky above holy Golgotha stretching out as far as the holy Mount of Olives. It was not seen by just one or two but was most clearly displayed before the whole population of the city. Nor did it, as one might have supposed, pass away quickly like something imagined but was visible to sight above the earth for some hours, while it sparkled with a light above the sun's rays. Of a surety, it would have been overcome and hidden by them, had it not exhibited to those who saw it a brilliance more powerful than the sun, so that the whole population of the city made a sudden concerted rush into the Martyry, [the church] seized by a fear that mingled with joy at the heavenly vision. They poured in, young and old, men and women of every age, not only Christians but pagans from elsewhere sojourning in Jerusalem, all of them as with one mouth raised a hymn of praise to the worker of wonders, Christ Jesus our Lord, the Only-begotten Son of God and indeed attested to through experience, came to discern that the honorable [pious] Christian teaching is to be found not only in **"persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power"** (I Corinthians 2:4), and not only preached by man but, witnessed by God from Heaven. **"Announced originally through the Lord, it was confirmed for us by those who had heard. God added His testimony by signs, wonders, and various acts of power"** (Hebrews 2:3-4). We consider it our obligation not to remain silent about this Heavenly vision, but through this letter, hasten to inform Your God-glorified and Pious One." O my brethren, everything is possible with God: both, to reveal the created to man and to create the uncreated. But most importantly for us is that He wants to redeem our souls from sin and death and to give us life eternal. Let us pray to Him for this day and night.

O Lord Almighty, To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 20 -

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYRS, JOHN AND OTHERS FROM THE MONASTIC BROTHERHOOD OF SAINT SABAS THE SANCTIFIED NEAR JERUSALEM

This glorious monastery, which still exists today, was visited by our own Serbian St. Sava and endowed by several Serbian rulers. Many times it was attacked by brutal Arabs, pillaged and laid waste. But, by the Divine Providence of God, it was always restored and is preserved until today. During the reign of Constantine and Irene, it was attacked and pillaged by the Arabs. The monks did not want to flee but, counseling with their abbot Thomas, they said, "We have fled from the world into this wilderness for the sake of our love for Christ and it would be shameful if we fled from the wilderness out of fear of men. If we are slain here, we will be slain because of our love for Christ for Whose cause we came to live here." Having decided, they awaited the armed Arabs, unarmed as lambs before wolves. Some of the monks the Arabs killed with arrows and some they sealed off in the cave of St. Sabas. They lighted a fire at the entrance of the cave and all were suffocated by the smoke. Thus many of them died as martyrs for the sake of Christ and were translated into the Kingdom of Him Whom they loved and for Whose love they perished. They suffered honorably prior to the Feast of the Resurrection in 796 A.D., during the reign of Constantine and Irene and Elijah, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. A just punishment quickly befell these savage attackers. Returning to their tents, they began to quarrel among themselves and in mutual combat all were slain. This occurred in the year 796 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR PHOTINA

This was the Samaritan woman who had the rare fortune to converse with the Lord Christ Himself at the Well of Jacob, near Sychar (**St. John 4:4-31**). Believing in the Lord, Photina afterwards went to preach His Gospel with Victor and Josiah her two sons, and with her five sisters, Anatolia, Phota, Photida, Parasceve and Cyriaca. They had gone to Carthage in Africa. There they were arrested and taken to Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero and were thrown into prison. By God's Divine Providence, Domnina, the daughter of Nero, came into contact with St. Photina and was converted to the Faith of Christ by her. After imprisonment they all suffered for the sake of Christ. Photina, who for the first time was enlightened with the light of truth at the well of Sychar, was now thrown into a well where she died and entered into the eternal kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PHOTINA, THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

The Samaritan Woman met Christ at the well,
And was enlightened with the light of Christ, Himself.
Under Nero, her life she ended in another well,
And her spirit she gave to Christ God, her Lord.
Her glorious sons were Victor and Josiah,
Both, the saintly mother enlightened with holiness.
Five sisters suffered for the Name of Christ,
With her were translated to heaven, their reward to receive.
O, penitent Photina, wonderful sufferer,
How your countenance with eternal light now glows.
At one time, not even water did you give to the Savior,
Finally, even your blood for Him, you shed.
Your soul at one time darkened, while yet a Samaritan you were,
When you became a Christian, above the sun's rays, you shown.
In Sychar, you proclaimed Christ with fear,
In the center of Rome, by your death you witnessed to Him.
Love, every fear, destroys and makes one a hero,
O, Photina, love, forever, glorified you.
Two or three Romes, can Nero burn down
But the soul of Christians cannot burn.
The vessels of clay, Nero can smash
But, over the spirit of Photina, did not have any power.
O, immortal saint, help us now,
By your prayers, before the Throne of Christ the Savior.

REFLECTION

God does not punish sinners because it gives Him gratification to destroy men. If that gave Him gratification, He would not have created man out of nothing. He punishes man out of more important constructive reasons, of which two are most apparent to us: **First**, that by punishment He corrects them and leads him on the true path of salvation; **second**, to frighten others from sinning. St. Isaac also thinks this when he says, "The just wise man is similar to God, for he punishes man, not to reproach him for his sin but either to correct man or to instill fear in others." One recalcitrant young man, who ridiculed God and his parents, suddenly went insane. The entire city in which this young man lived saw, in this, the punishment of God and were terrified with the fear of God. The young man was held bound and isolated for three years. His mother wept bitterly and prayed to God for her son. One year, during the Feast of Pentecost, the mother brought her insane son to the monastery of St. Basil in Ostrog. After prayers, the insane youth was cured and became himself again. After that, he became an exemplary person and a true Christian.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus crucified on the cross:

1. How blood flows from His hands and drips to the ground;
2. How blood flows from His feet and drips to the ground;
3. How blood flows from beneath His ribs and drips to the ground.

HOMILY

-About the battle of the Lamb with the beasts-

"They will fight with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, for He is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings" (Revelation 17:14).

Who speaks these marvelous words? John, who saw God. Who is this Lamb? Christ the Lord. Who is this Lord of Lords and King of Kings? Christ the Lord. With whom will He wage war and whom will He defeat? He will defeat the beast which has seven heads and all those whom receive authority, honor and riches from the unclean beast. **The Lamb among the beasts!** St. John also saw the Lamb as the Victor over all the beasts. **Christ among the demons!** One would say, "They will devour Him!" Nevertheless, the terrified demons cry out to Him for mercy and flee from Him without turning back. **Christ among His tormentors!** One would say, "They will destroy Him forever." Nevertheless, He resurrects and conquers and they flee from Him in terror and perish. **The Church among the heathens!** One would say, "They will flood her [The Church] like the waves over a small island." Nevertheless, the pagan kingdoms sank and fell apart and the Church still exists, flourishes and advances. **The Faith of Christ among the pungent philosophers and theoreticians!** One would say, "They will out-smart it [The Faith] and banish it [The Faith] from the world." Nevertheless, they steer one another into lies and persecutions but the Faith of Christ saves men. **Reverence among the blasphemers of God and apostates from God!** One would say, "We will soil it!" Nevertheless, they are smothered in their own filth and reverence preserves itself in unsoiled purity. **Christian meekness and tearfulness in the midst of tyrants and abductors!** One would say, "It will die of hunger!" Nevertheless, it lives and walks satiated, while the tyrants and abductors suffer from starvation. **The Lamb among the beasts!** Nevertheless, the Lamb is the Victor.

O Lord, Meek and Good, Lamb of God, all caressing, imbue us with Your meekness and goodness, so that even we may share in Your victory.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 21 -

1. SAINT JAMES, BISHOP AND CONFESSOR

Neither the place of his birth nor the place where James served as bishop are known. Only this is known: he fulfilled the law of Christ and spent much time in mortifying himself through strict fasting and prayer. During the time of Copronymos, James endured great hardships and suffering at the hands of the Iconoclasts, such as hunger, imprisonment and ridicule of all sorts. Finally, he gave up his soul to God, Whom he had faithfully served in this life. He lived and suffered in the eighth century.

2. VENERABLE CYRIL, THE BISHOP OF CATANIA IN SICILY

Born in Antioch, Cyril was a disciple of St. Peter. He governed the flock of Christ well. With the aid of prayer, he had the gift of working many miracles. He did so with bitter water which was unfit to drink. In that place in the summer, there was no other water, but through prayer he changed this bitter water into sweet drinkable water. He died peacefully.

3. SAINT THOMAS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Thomas lived during the reign of the Emperors Maurice and Phocas and at the time of the Patriarchs St. John the Faster and Cyriac. Because of his great piety and zeal, Thomas attracted the attention of St. John and was advanced to the order of patriarchal deputy by that saint. Following the death of Cyriac, Thomas was elected patriarch. At this time, an extraordinary event occurred. On one occasion when there was a procession with crosses, the crosses began to sway on their own and began to strike one another. All the people were amazed at this. When the patriarch learned about this being an actual occurrence, he summoned Theodore Sykeon, the renown hermit who possessed the "gift of discernment." The patriarch implored Theodore to explain to him what this incident foretells. Theodore prayed to God and revealed to the patriarch that this occurrence portends great misfortunes, both for the Church and for the Greek Empire, which will surface as a result of internal religious and internal political dissensions. Christians will fight and annihilate each other. All of this was shortly fulfilled. Thomas implored Theodore to pray for him that God would take him before these tragedies begin. "Do you command that I come to you or that we see each other over there before God." This is how Theodore replied to the patriarch, indicating that the patriarch would die soon. That very same day the patriarch became ill and died. Shortly after him, St. Theodore also died. St. Thomas died and took up habitation with the Lord in 610 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE SERAPION

Serapion was a companion of St. Anthony the Great. He was the abbot of the Monastery of Arsina in the Nitrian wilderness where there were over eleven thousand monks. Paladius and Sozomenus called him "Great." He died about the year 366 A.D. St. Serapion wrote, "Do not think that sickness is difficult; only sin is difficult. Sickness accompanies us only to the grave but sin follows the sinner even after the grave."

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SERAPION

Serapion, to save a sinner, he wanted,
The appearance of a sinner upon himself, he then took,
And to the sinner he entered, as if sin to commit,
But before sinning, to her, in this manner, he spoke:
You wait for a while, the entire night we have
Until, my prayer, I complete, then to misdeed we will proceed!
Serapion began the prayers to read
Uplifting his mind toward God, that it not wander anywhere.
And prayer after prayer began to reel off,
Sigh after sigh, to the Most High he uplifts.
The entire Psalter and other prayers he read,
And lengthy prayers for the sinner he began;
With sobbing and sighing, his prayers he interrupts,
Until even the sinful woman began to moan,
To moan and sob as never before in her life,
Realized that the saint, because of sin did not come,
Rather to save her from her perversion
And to raise her to God and from mud to cleanse her.
Then, exclaimed the woman: What should I do?
Behold, ashamed and repulsed with myself, am I!
Serapion, then instructions, gave he to her,
And to the wise sisters, committed her to their care.
Then the path before him, to the wilderness he took
Joyful, because a sinful soul he saved.

REFLECTION

You will hear this kind of justification from many who pursue riches: "When I become rich, I will be able to perform good works!" Do not believe them, for they deceive both you and themselves. St. John Climacus knew in depth the most secret motives of men's souls when he said, "**The beginning of love of money is the pretext of alms giving and the end of it is hatred of the poor**" (Step 16). This is confirmed by all lovers of money, the rich or the less rich. The average man says, "If only it were that I had money, I would carry out this and that good work!" Do not believe him. Let him not believe himself. Let him look at himself, as in a mirror, at those who have money and who are not willing to do this or that good work. That is how he would be if he acquired some money. Again, the wise John says, "**Do not say that you are collecting money for the poor; so that through and by this you give help to them, in order to gain the kingdom; remember, for two mites the kingdom was purchased**" (Step 16) - (St. Luke 21:2). Truly, the Gospel widow purchased it for two mites, and the rich man, before whose gates Lazarus lay, could not purchase it for all of his countless riches. If you have nothing to give to the poor, pray to God that He will give to them and, by this, you have performed almsgiving and purchased the Heavenly Kingdom. When St. Basil the New prophesied to the empress, the wife of Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, that she will first give birth to a daughter and then a son, the empress offered him much gold. The saint refused it. The empress implored the name of the Holy Trinity that he should take the gold. Then, St. Basil took only three pieces of gold and gave it to the needy Theodora, who served him saying, "We do not need too much of these thorns, for they prick much."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus crucified on the cross:

1. His head is sorely wounded by the thorny wreath;
2. His eyes are closed from pain;
3. His mouth is dry from thirst.

HOMILY

-About the First and Last who lives-

"Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever" (Revelation 1:17-18).

Thus says the Lord Jesus to His beloved disciple John in a vision on the island of Patmos. Do not be afraid of what! Do not be afraid of the persecution of the Church by the pagans. Do not be afraid of the tormentors who persecute my faithful on all sides. Do not be afraid of emperors who raise up persecutions against the Christians. Do not be afraid of powerful tyrants of this world who mock and ridicule My humility in My death. Do not be afraid of demons who blind men with passions so that they can't see the truth which I brought to the world. Do not be afraid of anything!

How could I not be afraid, O Lord!, Why then should we not be afraid when the entire world is armed to the tooth and assembled against us who are small in number and unarmed?

Do not be afraid for I am the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega. All of those forces armed against you are nothing but a whirlwind of the dead. I am before time and I am after time; before the beginning of all and after the end of all things that were created, I Am! They are all locked in one span of time that I measured out to every created thing and outside of this span of time, they cannot extend. **"Do not be afraid, once I was dead but now, I am alive."** Do not be afraid, not even of death. I am before death and after death. Death is my servant and I permit my servant to serve me in the world. I gave myself up to my servant for three days and ordered him to release me and "now, I am alive." I am the Master of death as well as of life. I am the Master of time as well as of eternity. Do not be afraid! "I am alive forever and ever." And you will be alive with Me. All they who remain faithful to Me and are not afraid will live with Me. **"Do not be afraid, I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Revelation 1:11).**

O Lord, Eternal and Immortal, allow these holy words of Yours to ring in the souls of Your faithful always whenever a persecution is raised up against Your Holy Church that, holding on to Your right hand, we may not be afraid.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 22 -

1. THE PRIEST-MARTYR BASIL, PRESBYTER OF ANCYRA

Under Emperor Constantius, Basil endured and suffered much at the hands of the Arians. At that time he was renowned as a great zealot of Orthodoxy and a true shepherd of his entrusted flock in Ancyra. When Julian the Apostate ascended the throne, he began to persecute Christians. Because Basil openly unmasked this latest impurity and strengthened his people in the Faith, he was cast into prison. When Emperor Julian came to Ancyra, Basil was brought before him and the emperor tried to persuade him to abandon his faith in Christ, promising him honors and riches. Basil answered the emperor; "I believe in my Christ, Whom you denied and Who gave you this earthly kingdom; but, that will be taken away from you, shortly. Have you no shame of the sacred altar under which you were saved when they sought to kill you as an eight year old child? That is why this temporary kingdom will be taken from you shortly and your body will not be buried when your soul is violently wrested from you in bitter pains." Julian became enraged and ordered that seven strips of skin be peeled from his body everyday. The tormentors did this for several days. When Basil appeared again before the emperor, he took a belt of his own skin and threw it into the face of Julian and crying out to him said, "Take it, Julian, and eat if this kind of food is sweet to you but, for me, Christ is Life." This incident was proclaimed throughout the towns, and the emperor, out of shame, secretly departed from Ancyra to Antioch. They continued to torture Basil with red hot irons until he gave up his soul to God, for Whom he suffered in the year 363 A.D.

2. SAINT DROSIDA

Drosida was the daughter of Emperor Trajan. She was captured with five other women at night while they were gathering the bodies of the tortured martyrs for Christ. For this she was severely disfigured by the emperor. Those five women were horribly tortured and, in the end, were thrown into a vat of molten copper, where they gave up their souls to their Lord. Drosida remained under the strict guard of the emperor. She escaped from the palace and baptized herself in a river. After eight days she gave up her soul to God.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR, EUTHYMIUS

Euthymius was born in the village of Dimitsana in the Peloponnese. As a child, Euthymius lived as a Christian but, later on, he went to Romania where he gave himself over to a life of great debauchery. In this debauchery an evil spirit led him to become a Muslim. As soon as he did that, Euthymius began to repent bitterly. He again returned to the Faith of Christ and was tonsured a monk in Athos, the Holy Mountain. After several years spent in strict fasting and prayer, he decided to die for Christ. With the blessing of his spiritual father, he traveled to Constantinople where he succeeded somehow to come before the Grand Vezir. Euthymius began to cross himself, to praise Christ and to insult Mohammed in the presence of the Vezir. After prolonged torture he was sentenced to death and beheaded on Palm Sunday, March 22, 1814 A.D. Many miraculous healings of the sick occurred over his relics. His honorable head is preserved in the Russian Monastery of St. Panteteimom [Pantaleon] in the Holy Mountain. And so, this twenty-year old youth, at first, died to Christ and after that died for Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

CHRIST THE LORD AS A FISHERMAN

A wonderful Fisherman, O Christ the Lord, You are,
Throughout the entire world, the nets You spread,
For pure pearls You trawl from the waters deep,
Invisible net, by the Spirit woven,
Woven with love, moistened with tears,
By angelic hands, everywhere upheld.
Everyone to whom a mother gave birth and by the Spirit reared,
Most beautiful souls all, that the world can give.
All that into the numbers of Your rich catch entered,
All that Your silk net caught.
When nets from the sea of life, You raise
Nothing will remain except the muddy scum.
O, Fisherman, Most Wonderful, of pure pearls,
And we sinners, Your pearls, at one time were,
Now, from Your Throne, we are far away,
Under the sediment of dark passions, covered are we,
But, may Your net also us, to seize,
From Your countenance, we will shine as the stars.

REFLECTION

Even in His pain on the cross, the Lord Jesus did not condemn sinners but offered pardon to His Father for their sins saying, **"They know not what they do!" (St. Luke 23:34)**. Let us not judge anyone so that we will not be judged. For no one is certain that before his death he will not commit the same sin by which he condemns his brother. Saint Anastasius of Sinai teaches, "Even if you see someone sinning, do not judge him for you do not know what the end of his life will be like. The thief, crucified with Christ, entered Paradise and the Apostle Judas went to Hell. Even if you see someone sinning, bear in mind that you do not know his good works. For many have sinned openly and repented in secret; we see their sins, but we do not know their repentance. That is why, brethren, let us not judge anyone so that we will not be judged."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus crucified on the cross:

1. How infinite is His sorrow for mankind blinded by sin;
2. How His thoughts on the cross are directed more to His Heavenly Father than to Himself;
3. How His concern on the cross is directed more at mankind than to Himself;
4. How on the cross He is certain of His Victory and Resurrection.

HOMILY

-About the majesty of Christ the Victor-

"The hair of His head was as white wool or as snow and His eyes were like a fiery flame" (Revelation 1:14).

That is how John the Theologian (the one who gazed upon God) saw Jesus after His resurrection and victory. He saw Him as the Son of Man, clothed in a lengthy garment, girded about with a golden sash, with seven stars in His right hand, and His face **"shone like the sun at its brightest" (Revelation 1:16)**. It was with this kind of power and glory that He appeared, Who on the cross was not radiant and Who seemed to be as the weakest of the sons of men to all the passersby. Why were His hairs like white wool and white as snow? Was not our Lord barely thirty-four years old when they killed Him? From where, then, His white hair? Does not white hair indicate old age? It is true that white hair does indicate old age with mortal man, but with Christ in Glory it indicated more than old age; it indicated eternity. Eternal youthful age! Old age is the past and youth is the future. At the same time, is He not the one and the other? More than all the times past and all future times and even beyond time, Christ is eternity beyond time. Why were His eyes like a flame of fire? Because He is the All-seeing. All sorts of things can be hidden from the sun, but of all that is in the heavens, on the earth or under the earth, nothing can be hidden from His sight. He perceives all the threads of the fabric of nature; He perceives all the atoms in the stones, every drop of water in the sea, every particle of air and all thoughts and all desires of every created soul. This is the One and the same and no other; He who out of compassion for the human race came to earth, clothed Himself in a mortal and suffering body, was ridiculed, was mocked and was spat upon by sinful men. That is the same One, and no other, Who, without radiance, hung on the cross between thieves and, as a dead man, was buried by Joseph and Nicodemus.

O brethren, how awesome it is to think what a great and majestic Visitor the earth had! It is even more awesome to think against Whom the deranged men raised their hands!

O Majestic Lord, forgive us our sins and remember us all in Your Power and Glory.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR NICON

Nicon was born in Naples of a pagan father and Christian mother. Nicon was a Roman officer in Naples and was not baptized, even though his mother tutored him secretly from his father in the Faith of Christ. Once, when Nicon was sent into battle with his troops, his mother counseled him to make the sign of the cross and to call upon Christ for help if any misfortune would befall him. And, indeed, while in battle, Nicon's troops were completely surrounded; and, toward the end of the battle, Nicon made the sign of the cross in his heart and cried out to Christ. Immediately, he was filled with unusual strength and pursued his enemies. Some he slew and others he forced to flee. Returning to his home, Nicon continuously cried out in amazement, "Great is the Christian God." Since he had made his mother happy with the news of his victory with the help of the Cross of Christ, he secretly sailed to Asia where Theodosius the Bishop of Cyzicus baptized him. Following his baptism, he secluded himself in a monastery where he devoted himself to study and asceticism. Before his death Theodosius had a vision in which he was told to ordain Nicon as his successor. Immediately the aged Theodosius summoned Nicon and ordained him a deacon; after that, a priest, and then, a bishop. Shortly thereafter, according to God's Providence, Nicon came to Naples where he discovered that his mother was still living. Following his mother's death, Nicon, with nine disciples, his former war companions, withdrew to Sicily and there dedicated himself to preaching the Gospel. However, at that time there was a terrible persecution of Christians. Prince Quintianus captured Nicon with his companions and inflicted great pain and suffering upon them. His one-hundred ninety disciples and companions were beheaded. The tormentor tied Nicon to the tail of a horse, hurled him from a steep wall into a gorge, beat him, and skinned him; but Nicon survived all of these tortures. Finally, he was beheaded and took up habitation with the Lord. His body was left in the fields to be devoured by the birds. A certain herdsman, with a rabid evil spirit, tripped and fell over the dead body of Christ's martyr and immediately the herdsman was healed. Proclaiming the news about Nicon's body, Christians came forth and honorably buried the body of Nicon. St. Nicon suffered during the reign of the Emperor Decius.

2. THE VENERABLE NICON OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Nicon was a companion of St. Anthony of the Caves and a spiritual father to the Venerable Theodosius. Because of the monastic tonsuring of the Boyar Barlaam and of the eunuch Ephrem, Nicon was threatened by Prince Izjaslav; but his wife, the princess, turned the anger of the prince into the fear of God. Then Nicon, the holy one, was left in peace. Wanting to adorn the church with icons, Nicon implored God for assistance. As a result of his prayers, certain Greek iconographers unexpectedly came to Kiev from Constantinople. St. Anthony and St. Theodosius appeared to these iconographers in a vision and directed them to Nicon in Kiev.(*). Nicon was praised because of his courageous asceticism and spiritual wisdom. Against his will, Nicon, in his old age, became the abbot of Pecer. He presented himself to the Lord in the year 1066 A.D. His incorruptible relics are persevered in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev.

(*) In the Greek Synaxarion and the Athonite Patericon, the Neo-martyr Luke, who was born in Jedren is commemorated on this day. As a child he was captured in Constantinople by the Turks and was circumcised. Because of this, he had bitter pangs of conscience. He considered circumcision the devil's mark on him which could only be destroyed through martyrdom for Christ. Tonsured a monk on Mt. Athos, he went with his Elder Bessarion to Mytilene and there was hanged by the Turks on March 23, 1802. Hanging in the air, the body of the martyr emitted a fragrant oil [Chrism].

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT NICON

In the dungeon, Nicon languished,
And day and night he prayed to God.
For his defense, did not pray to God,
Nor to revenge Quintianus, the wicked,
But for strength, to endure sufferings.
Nicon's sighings, God heard.
One time Nicon dreamed in prayer:
To him, the Virgin appeared in light,
Than the sun, more beautiful and brighter.
Than a lamb, whiter and gentler,
At her side, two archangels are,
Their faces, radiant and joyful,
With their height, to the heavens they reach,
The river they point out, one to the other:
That is the wavy river Psimif!
Then, one archangel to the Virgin says,
To Quintianus, were we sent to slay
In the waves of the raging Psimif.
But, behold, we are looking over the river
And nowhere Quintianus do we see?
As honey flowing from her mouth, the Virgin spoke:
To the river, soon, he will come,
Through the waves, he will attempt to cross,
But, beneath him, his horse will become enraged,
His face, by his teeth, will he disfigure,
Him, the river will drown,
And thus, your task, you will complete.
That is the end of the evil torturer of Nicon, my saint.
All of this took place as the Virgin said,
Everything that Nicon dreamed became a reality.

REFLECTION

St. Paphnutius prayed to God to reveal to him, who it is that he [Paphnutius] resembled. He heard a voice which spoke to him, "You are similar to a merchant who seeks good pearls; arise and do not be idle!" But why would not God say to everyone of us that we are similar to a merchant who seeks good pearls? Because many of us do not seek pearls, rather we gorge ourselves with heavy layers of cheap dust. Not everything which the net raises up from the bottom of the sea is a pearl; sometimes, it is only mud and sand. The ignorant vie for that mud and sand as though it were a pearl. Only the merchant who recognizes a true pearl casts the net into the sea untold number of times. He hauls it up, sifts it of mud and sand, until he finds one seed of pearl! Why does God compare Paphnutius to a merchant? Because Paphnutius gave away all of his possessions, invested all of his effort and all of his time, in order to find that one seed of the true pearl. That true pearl is the heart cleansed of all passions and of evil thoughts and warmed by the flame of love toward God. Arise also, you man, and do not be lazy! Your marketing day is approaching its twilight.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus crucified on the cross:

1. How His compassionate love for mankind did not diminish because of His sufferings;
2. How, with love, He offers comfort to His mother, commending John to her, as a son, in place of Himself;
3. How, with love, He prays to the Father for mankind: " **Father, forgive them, they know not what they do**" (St. Luke 23:24).

HOMILY

-About the weakness of man before the majesty of God-

"When I caught sight of Him, I fell down at His feet as though dead" (Revelation 1:17).

It was St. John who fell as though dead when he saw the Lord Jesus in glory. St. John, the Beloved Disciple of Jesus, The Evangelist, The Chaste One, The one who loved the Lord, and a zealot for holiness - could not stand on his feet nor compose himself when he saw his Teacher in His heavenly glory and power! But, **"fell, as though dead."** How will they, therefore, endure the presence of the Lord and His eyes **"a fiery flame,"** they who sin against Him, they who rise up against Him, they who ridicule His Name, they who despise His love and sacrifice, they who mock His cross, they who trample upon His commandments, they who persecute His Church, they who shame His priests, and they who kill His faithful? What will happen to them before the face of the Lord when St. John fell as dead when he caught sight of Him? What will happen to the literate who corrupt? What will happen to teachers who destroy the Faith in young souls? What will happen to skeptics who through their doubt poison the minds of men? What will happen to thieves and robbers and what will happen to the immoral and what will happen to the child-killers? What will happen to the enemies of Christ when the friend of Jesus falls, as though dead, before His indescribable, glistening glory? Such is the glory, power, authority, beauty, lordship, light and majesty of the Lord Jesus, resurrected and ascended, that His closest companions who for three years on earth gazed upon His face without fear, now fall as though dead when they see His face in the heavens following His passion, death and victory!

O Lord All-glorious and Almighty illuminate us and enliven us by Your power and glory.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 24 -

1. SAINT ARTEMON BISHOP OF SELEUCIA

Artemon was born and educated in Seleucia. When the Apostle Paul came to that city, he met Artemon, strengthened him even more in the Faith of Christ and appointed him bishop of that city. Artemon governed his entrusted flock with love and zeal. He was a physician of the souls as well as the bodies of men. He entered into eternity in ripe old age.

2. VENERABLE JAMES, THE CONFESSOR

James suffered while defending icons under Leo the Armenian. He was a monk and a member of the brotherhood of the Studite Monastery. When the Studite Theodore the Great was in exile, James was subjected to severe tortures in order to persuade him to renounce the veneration of icons. To the end he remained steadfast and faithful to Orthodoxy. Beaten and tortured, he was finally sent back to the monastery after the wicked Emperor Leo came to a wretched end. As a result of severe blows, he died in the monastery and took up habitation among the heavenly citizens.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR PARTHENIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Parthenius was born on the Island of Mytilene. He was the bishop of Chios for a long time. Afterwards he was elected patriarch of Constantinople. Because of false rumors that he allegedly worked against the State, the Turks initially proposed that he become a Muslim. When he adamantly refused, they hanged him in the year 1657 A.D.

4. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE MIRACLE IN THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Two companions, John and Sergius, vowed to adopt each other as blood brothers before an icon of the Holy Mother of God in this monastery. John was a wealthy man, and he had a five year old son Zacharias. John became very ill. Before his death, John commended his son to the care of Sergius and bequeathed a large amount of gold and silver to him for safe keeping so that Sergius would hand it over to his son Zacharias when he reached maturity. When Zacharias reached maturity, Sergius denied that he received anything from the deceased John. Then Zacharias said, "Let him swear before that very icon of the All-Holy Mother of God, before whom he entered into a blood-brother relationship with my deceased father; and if he swears that he did not receive anything from my father John, then I will not seek anything from him." Sergius agreed. When Sergius swore this, he wanted to approach and venerate the icon, but a force held him back and would not allow it. Sergius then began to cry out in a crazed manner to the Holy Fathers, Anthony and Theodosius; "Do not allow this unmerciful angel to destroy me!" That was the demon that attacked him by God's permission. After that, Sergius showed them all the money that John entrusted to him. When they opened the chest, they discovered that the amount had doubled. This amount was doubled by God's Providence. After receiving the money, Zacharias gave it to the monastery and was then tonsured a monk. Zacharias lived for a long time and was made worthy of the great gifts of God and was translated peacefully into eternity.

5. THE VENERABLE ZACHARIAS

Zacharias was the son of Carion the Egyptian. Zacharias left his wife and children and became a monk. He took his father with him because his mother was unable to care for him. Even though Zacharias was younger than most of the elders in the Scete, he was favored with greater gifts of Grace than many of the others were. He felt that his whole being was on fire with the Grace of God. To the question of St. Macarius: "Who is the ideal monk?" Zacharias replied, "He who continually compels himself to fulfill the commandments of God." To the question of Abba Moses: "What does it mean to be a monk?" Zacharias removed his monastic head gear [Kamilavka] and trampled it underfoot and said, "If a man is not shattered as this, he cannot be a monk." He was a great light among the monks of the wilderness and while still young died to the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

VANITY

What is the worth of man, O Lord, You said,
That the whole vast world as his property, he acquires,
When, either today or tomorrow, he must die,
And the accumulated wealth outlive him will.
What worth is it that upon his head, a crown he sets,
When behind him, he must leave it?
To him, what good is gold and a pile of silver,
When through his withered ribs, grass grows?
What good is silk, pearls and food,
When, upon him alive, the sun does not gaze?
Of what help is the world, if he loses his soul.
Without the soul, the body is lowered into the grave.
His body and soul, both have died,
And to its grave, each of them hurries.
Two lifeless ones, then men, do bury,
For neither of them, do men bitterly mourn.
Anyone who has a mind, over his soul, let him guard,
You gave to all a reminder clear:
The soul is the only thing that can be saved,
All else in the world, and even the world itself will perish.
When we know Your counsel, O dear Lord,
Still, Your power and help we need.
Help our sinful soul, O Good One,
That the smoke of vanity suffocate it not.

REFLECTION

Abba Daniel and Abba Ammoe were traveling. Abba Ammoe said, "Father, when will we arrive at the cell?" (that is, so that they could to pray to God). Abba Daniel replied, "And who is taking God away from us now?" The same God is in the cell and outside the cell.. By this we are taught uninterruptedness of prayer, thoughts about God, and contemplation of God's works in us and around us. The Church facilitates prayer and intensifies it. So it is the same with solitude and confinement; each in its own way facilitates and intensifies it. He who does not want to pray will not be bound either by a church or a cell. Neither will he who has felt the pleasure of prayer be able to separate his nature or journeying from prayer.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus on the cross crucified:

1. Counting the drops of His All-Holy Blood and counting my sins;
2. Counting His painful sighs and counting the stupid days of my laughter.

HOMILY

-About faithfulness in suffering and the crown of life-

"Do not be afraid of anything that you are going to suffer. Remain faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

By His suffering our Lord eased our suffering. He endured the greatest of pain and emerged as the Victor. That is why He can encourage us in our lesser sufferings. He suffered and endured in righteousness while we suffer and endure in expiating our own sins. This is why He can doubly remind us to endure to the end as He, the Sinless One, endured. Not one of us has helped nor alleviated His pains and endurance, yet He stands along side each one of us when we suffer and alleviates our pains and misfortunes. That is why He has the right to tell each one who suffers for His Name's sake: **"Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid of anything that you are going to suffer,"** says Christ, for I alone have endured all suffering and am familiar with them. I was not frightened at not a single suffering. I received them upon Myself and, in the end, overcame them all. I did not overcome them by dismissing them or fleeing from them but receiving them all upon Myself voluntarily and enduring them all to the end. And so you also should accept voluntary suffering, for I see and know how much and for how long you can endure.

If your suffering should continue to death itself and if it is the cause of your death, nevertheless, do not be afraid; **"I will give you the crown of life."** I will crown you with immortal life in which I reign eternally with the Father and the Life-Giving Spirit. God did not send you to earth to live comfortably, rather to prepare for eternal life. It would be a great tragedy if your Creator were unable to give you a better, longer, and brighter life than that which is on earth which reeks of decay and death and is shorter than the life of a raven.

O my brethren, let us listen to the words of the Lord and all of our sufferings will be alleviated. If the blows of the world seem as hard as stones, they will become as the foam of the sea when we obey the Lord.

O Victorious Lord, teach us more about Your long-suffering; and when we become exhausted, extend Your hand and sustain us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 25 -

1. THE ANNUNCIATION

When the All-Holy Virgin completed the fourteenth year after her birth and was entering her fifteenth year, after having spent eleven years of living and serving in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests informed her that, according to the Law, she could not remain in the Temple but was required to be betrothed and enter into marriage. What a great surprise to the priests was the answer of the All-Holy Virgin that she had dedicated her life to God and that she desired to remain a Virgin until death, not wanting to enter into marriage with anyone! Then, according to Divine Providence, Zacharias, the high priest and father of the Forerunner, under the inspiration of God, and in agreement with the other priests, gathered twelve unwed men from the Tribe of David to betroth the Virgin Mary to one of them to preserve her virginity and to care for her. She was betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth who was her kinsman. In the house of Joseph, the All-Holy Virgin continued to live as she did in the Temple of Solomon, occupying her time in the reading of Sacred Scripture, in prayer, in Godly-thoughts, in fasting and in handiwork. She rarely went anywhere outside the house nor was she interested in worldly things and events. She spoke very little to anyone, if at all, and never without special need. More frequently she communicated with both of Joseph's daughters. When the fullness of time had come, as prophesied by Daniel the Prophet, and when God was pleased to fulfill His promise to the banished Adam and to the Prophets, the great Archangel Gabriel appeared in the chamber of the All-Holy Virgin and, as some priestly writers wrote, precisely at that same moment when she held open the book of the Prophet Isaiah and was contemplating his great prophecy: **"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son!" (Isaiah 7:13)**. Gabriel appeared in all of his angelic brightness and saluted her: **"Rejoice, highly favored one! The Lord is with you" (St. Luke 1:28)**, and the rest in order as it is written in the Gospel of the saintly Luke. With this angelic annunciation and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Virgin, the salvation of mankind and restoration of all creation began. The history of the New Testament was opened by the words of the Archangel Gabriel: **"Rejoice, highly favored one"** This is to imply that the New Testament was to signify joy to mankind and to all created things. It is from this that the Annunciation is considered not only a great feast, but a joyful feast as well.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYRS PELAGIA, THEODOSIA AND DULA

These three holy women suffered for the Lord. After imprisonment and sufferings both Pelagia and Theodosia were beheaded. St. Dula, who was a servant girl, suffered alone in the city of Nicomedia. These three white roses, watered by the blood of the martyrs, were transplanted by God into His heavenly garden.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

(The Theotokos)

-O what wonderful news: rejoice, All-pure one,
for us, you gave birth to Christ!
-O joyful news: rejoice o Virgin,
Radiant Dove!
-Rejoice o Mary, rejoice, o one full of grace,
You, the golden gate!
-O burning bush, unconsumed,
The dawn of new splendor!
-Gabriel composes the words, and he himself rejoices,
The annunciation he proclaims!
-Proclaims the annunciation, all of heaven listens,
Your Soul trembles!
-In the temple you served, to God you consecrated yourself,
you became the temple!
-Rejoice, o Pure one, heavenly bride,
You are the royal throne!
-Rejoice, o humble one, to the Humble one, you will give birth,
And regenerate the world!
-Rejoice, o Obedient one, God heard you
And crowned you with glory!
-Rejoice, o Tearful one, by tears softened,
By the spirit glistening!
-Rejoice, o Poor one, but the wealthiest one
And brighter than the sun!
-For us, plead joy, from Christ your son,
O Virgin, all-pure one!

REFLECTION

Abba Athanasius was asked by some: "How is it that the Son is equal to the Father?" He answered, "Just as there are two eyes but one sight." The response is admirable. To this we can add: just as there are two ears but one hearing. The same is with all three Divine Hypostases: just as there are three candles but one and the same light.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the All-Holy Virgin Mary:

1. How she served God for eleven years in the Temple humbly, obediently and devotedly;
2. How she served God in her chamber in Nazareth, humbly, obediently and devotedly;
3. How humbly, obediently and devotedly she received the Divine Annunciation from the Archangel Gabriel.

HOMILY

-About the omnipotent Word of God-

"For nothing will be impossible for God"
(St. Luke 1:37).

"Then God said, Let there be light, and there was light"
(Genesis 1:3).

God spoke, there was no light. Nor was there anyone who could know what light was, until God spoke, and light came into being. In the same manner, when God spoke, then water and the dry land came into existence, the firmament of the heavens, vegetation, animals and finally man. Until God spoke, none of this existed nor was there anyone, except God, Who could know that all of this could exist. By the power of His word, God created all that is created on earth and in the heavens. Whatever God wanted to exist and spoke that it be, must be and it cannot but be, for the word of God is irresistible and creative. The creation of the world is a great miracle of the word of God.

Having created all things, God again, by His word, established the order of creation and the manner of behavior and relationship of creatures one with another. This order and manner which God established is a great miracle of God's word. There exists an order and manner among created things, visible and comprehensible for us people; and there also exists an order and manner, invisible and incomprehensible. According to that invisible and incomprehensible order and manner, which is a mystery in the Holy Trinity, there have occurred and are occurring those manifestations which people call miracles. One such manifestation is the conception of the Lord Jesus Christ in the womb of the All-Holy Virgin Mary without a husband [The Virgin Birth]. This appears like an interruption in the visible and comprehensible order and manner but it is never an interruption for the invisible and incomprehensible order and manner. This birth, truly, is a great miracle; perhaps the greatest miracle that was ever revealed to us mortals. But the entire created world is a miracle, and all the visible and comprehensible order and manner is a miracle, and altogether these miracles came about by the word of God; therefore, much in the same way the Lord was conceived in the Virgin's womb. Both one and the other was all brought about by the power and word of God. That is why the wonderful Gabriel replied to the question of the All-Pure One which is the question of all generations: **"How can this be?" (St. Luke 1:34)**, and he answered her: **"For nothing will be impossible for God" (St. Luke 1:37).**

O Lord God, our Creator, Immortal and Existing Miracle-Worker, enlighten our minds that we no longer doubt, but believe and enlighten our tongue that it not question You, but praise You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 26 -

1. THE HOLY ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

Gabriel is the announcer of the Incarnation of the Son of God. He is one of the seven archangels who stand before the Throne of God. He appeared to Zacharias about the birth of the Forerunner. Gabriel said of himself, **"I am Gabriel, who stand before God"** (St. Luke 1:19). His name Gabriel means "Man - God." The Holy Fathers, in speaking about the Annunciation, interpret that an archangel with such a name was sent to signify who and what He would be like, who must be born of the All-Pure One. Therefore, He will be Man-God, mighty and powerful God. Some of the Fathers understood that this same Gabriel appeared to Joachim and Anna concerning the birth of the Virgin Mary and that Gabriel instructed Moses in the wilderness to write the Book of Genesis. The Holy Fathers think that Gabriel has pre-eminence in the first and greatest order of heavenly powers, that is, the Seraphic Order, since the Seraphims stand closest to God. He is, therefore, one of the seven Seraphims, closest to God. The names of the seven are MICHAEL, GABRIEL, RAPHAEL, URIEL, SALATHIEL, JEGUDIEL, BARACHIEL. To this number some even add JEREMIEL. Each one has their own particular service and all are equal in honor. Why did God not send Michael? Because Michael's service is to suppress the enemies of the Faith of God while Gabriel's is the mission of announcing the salvation of mankind.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR IRENAEUS OF SREM

It is thought that Irenaeus was a Slav. He was married and had children prior to becoming a bishop. He suffered for Christ during the reign of Maximian. At the time of horrible sufferings, his relatives stood around him crying and begged him to spare himself and them [that is, to deny Christ]. But this wonderful priestly-martyr loved the wounds of Christ more than all the riches of this world. At the same time Seren, a certain gardener in Srem, also suffered at the hands of Prince Probus, as did Afrius suffer in Regia. Because Irenaeus did not want to deny his faith, Prince Probus ordered that he be hurled from a bridge into the Sava river, where this shepherd of Christ's flock died and took up habitation among the citizens of heaven. He honorably suffered in the year 304 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE MALCHUS

Malchus was a farmer from the vicinity of Antioch, and from his youth his entire soul was directed toward God. The Arabs enslaved him and while in slavery forced him to take a black woman for a wife. He converted her to the Faith of Christ and they lived together as brother and sister. Conspiring with each other, they escaped from bondage. The Arabs almost overtook them. They found shelter in a cave in which they saw a lioness with her pups, and they became frightened. But God protected them. The lioness did not harm them but killed an Arab who wanted to enter the cave to apprehend the runaways. Arriving at their destination, his wife entered a convent and Malchus entered a monastery. He lived many years, mortifying himself, and took up habitation among the citizens of heaven in the fourth century.

4. VENERABLE BASIL, THE NEW

At first Basil lived in the forest without shelter or hearth. When he was captured, they questioned him saying, "Who are you?" He replied, "One of the living on earth." They suspected him and thinking that he was a spy, tortured him. In the end, he lived for many years in freedom in Constantinople. He discerned all the human mysteries of man, perceived the future and worked great miracles. His maid was the elder woman Theodora who, when she died, appeared to Gregory, Basil's novice, and described to him the twenty levels of judgment [Mitarstvo] through which every soul must pass. On March 25, 944 A.D., St. Basil peacefully died and took up habitation in the wonderful heavenly family. After his death he was seen in great glory by a citizen of Constantinople.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE ARCHANGELS

Seven golden-headed of angelic rank,

Seven archangels, the highest spirits:

Michael, the sword for adversaries, is the first;

By the sword, he renders payment to those who wage war against God.

Gabriel, the herald of God's incarnation

And all wondrous recorder of human salvation.

Raphael, as a sun, is the servant of the Trinity;

Of vast human afflictions, he is the physician.

Uriel is the radiant light of God,

Of human souls, the enlightener.

Selathiel, the intercessor, prayers he presents,

And prayers of the people before God, he brings.

Jegudiel, glorifier of God the Almighty,

He, the willing man, to glory encourages,

Barachiel, dispenser of the blessing of heaven,

From God, he gives what men need.

REFLECTION

When a miracle occurs, do not be confused by it, rather, rejoice. God has placed His finger there, either to reward or to punish or to encourage His faithful or to lead the sinners on the path of salvation. People frequently compare this world to a fiery chariot. When you see a locomotive or another steam engine, you know that an engineer is hidden from view. That does not surprise you, does it? If the engineer puts his head out of the cab, waves his hand, extends a rod, waves a handkerchief, or tosses out a letter, or makes some other sign, you know that this does not interfere with the travel of the locomotive and does not damage one pin in it. Why, then, do the faithless say that God with His miracles interferes with the movement of these earthly chariots? Why? Because the faithless are unreasonable. The faithful rejoice at God's signs. A child is frightened before a fiery chariot but rejoices when a man, resembling himself, appears from the chariot. O, how dear it is to us when, from this mute universe which hurls around us, someone appears resembling us and that someone is one who recognizes and loves us! When a miracle occurs, know that He Who resembles us greets us and says, "Do not be afraid, I am beyond all of this." St. Basil the New worked many miracles. Through prayer he healed the sick and discerned the fate of people like an open book. Through His chosen ones, God, as always, demonstrated His love and power to men in order to firmly establish the faithful in the Faith and to shame the unfaithful and to return them to the Faith.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus crucified on the cross:

1. How He used the last breath of life and saves a thief on the cross;
2. How He commends His soul into the hands of the Father **"Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit"** (St. Luke 23:46).

HOMILY

-About the impending advent of the Lord-

"Behold, I am coming soon"(Revelation 22:7).

The unfaithful and the slayers of the spirit will say, "Nearly two thousand years ago He promised that He will come and He has not come yet!" This is how they, who ridiculed Him, will lament in eternal torment. But we who are prepared for happiness in His Kingdom know that He will come in power and glory just as He promised. We know that He has already come countless times and showed Himself to His faithful ones. Did He not come to John the Divine [the one who saw God] to whom He spoke these words, **"Behold, I am coming soon?"** John saw Him in power and glory and felt His hand on him when he was frightened and fell before His feet as dead, **"And He touched me with His right hand"** (Revelation 1:17). Did He not come to Saul when in the beginning he breathed hatred against the Christians and when on the road to Damascus fell on the ground, seeing the Lord and hearing His voice saying, **"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"** (Acts of the Apostles 9:4). And again, did He not enter into the heart of the Apostle Paul when he recognized that **"Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me!"** (Galatians 2:20). Did He not come to the countless martyrs, both male and female, who suffered for His Name, to encourage them, to heal them, and to have mercy on them? Did He not come to Anthony the Great, Theodore Stratelates, St. Haralambos, St. Marina, St. Sylvester and many, many more? What are we saying? Did He not return from the Kingdom of Death on the third day and appeared before the apostles? Did He not come to the aid of the Church many, many times and, as out of the dead, resurrected it whenever her enemies rejoiced, thinking that they had given His Church over to death forever? Did He not appear in His power in the Church at the time of Nero as well as at the time of Constantine; at the time of Julian, as well as at the time of Justinian; at the time of Arab tyranny, as well as at the time of the Turkish and Mongolian oppression over Christians?

O, my faithful brethren, do not submit to deception. He came countless times and comes even today. He comes to every soul to whom He can, regardless of impurity. However, we are all waiting for Him to come for the last time in power and glory. We know that His coming is certain.

O Lord Most Gracious, before You come, make us worthy to recognize Your face and to be ashamed of our faces, darkened by sin.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 27 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR, MATRONA

As an orphan girl Matrona was a servant in the home of a Jew in Thessalonica. The wife of the Jew continuously mocked Matrona because of her faith in Christ and tried to persuade her to deny Christ and to attend the synagogue. But the meek Matrona went about her work conscientiously and did not say anything to her mistress. But in secret she prayed to Christ the God. On one occasion the Jewess discovered that Matrona was attending church unbeknown to her and, in anger, questioned her as to why she did not attend the synagogue rather than the church? To that, Matrona replied, "Because in the Christian churches, God lives and He withdraws from the Jewish synagogues." Furious, because of this type of bold reply, the Jewess beat Matrona, locked her up in a dark room, and, in addition to that, bound her hands. The next day as she was kneeling in prayer and glorifying God, her ropes had fallen off by the power of God. Afterwards, on two occasions, she was locked up again and, in the end, died of starvation. This evil Jewish woman then took the body of this holy maiden and hurled it to the ground from the heights of her home. Christians took the body of this martyr and buried it with honors. Alexander the bishop, learning of the many miraculous works of this holy martyr, erected a church over her grave. The evil Jewess received her just punishment when she slipped, fell to the pavement, and was smashed to death from the same spot at the top of the house from which she hurled down Matrona's body.

2. VENERABLE JOHN "THE DISCERNER"

John was a woodsman until his twenty-fifth year and then, driven by an insatiable desire for constant prayer, withdrew into the wilderness where he lived until his death, during his ninetieth year. He was a corporeal being but lived as an incorporeal being. He discerned the heart of every person who came to him and was able to discern their name, their desires, and their thoughts. He prophesied to Emperor Theodosius the outcome of his battles. He prophesied for generals, monastics, and for all who found it necessary to know what was hidden for them in the darkness of future days. A prince once begged John to receive his wife who especially wanted to meet him. The saint did not allow empty inquisitiveness but appeared to the wife of the prince in a dream showing her what he was like. When the woman described her vision in the dream to her husband, he confirmed that, indeed, this was the likeness of the saint. To every visitor, he taught humility as the basis of the virtues, always citing examples from life of how pride has toppled many exalted characters into dust and led them into serious sins. He endured many assaults of evil spirits. On one occasion, Satan appeared to him with a myriad of demons under the guise of shining angels. They pressured him to worship Satan, lying to him, saying that it [Satan] is Christ. But John answered wisely, "I bow down and worship my King, Jesus Christ, everyday. If that were He, He would not demand me to do so now, especially since I already worship Him." Following these words, all the evil powers vanished as smoke. He died peacefully kneeling in prayer in his ninetieth year.

3. THE VENERABLE PAPHNUTIUS

Paphnutius was a disciple of St. Anthony the Great. By his sanctity of life, Paphnutius converted many sinners to the path of repentance, as did St. Thais, who is commemorated on October 8. Paphnutius resembled an incorporeal angel more than a corporeal man. He died toward the end of the fourth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE JOHN THE DISCERNER ON HUMILITY

John the Discerner, teacher of humility,
With tears of joy, about humility he spoke:
O beloved children, right-believing children,
The humbler you are, to God more dear
Asceticism, without humility helps not at all,
His soul to the devil, the arrogant one offers.
Your soul, if you empty of self,
The Living God will then fulfill you.
Than God Himself, Who is more humble?
His priority, nowhere does He indicate.
In secret, without clamor, the world He directs,
Therefore, the insane think that He does not even exist.
If the wind would not blow, nor shriek, nor howl,
About it, the insane would also say that it does not exist!
He who has humility, himself reprimands,
In every virtue, that one easily succeeds.
Than the poor in spirit, humility is nothing more,
That is the Savior's blessed teaching:
In yourself, do not have any hope,
In God place all of your hopes,
That is holy humility. Whoever violates it
The darkest destruction for his soul, that one prepares.
The thoughts of all the saints, in that, they are strict
Without much humility, no one is saved!
Joyous is the humble, because God rules with him.
O, beloved children, Being humble is akin to being saved!

REFLECTION

"There is no cleanness in him who thinks evil," says St. Simeon the New Theologian; and he further adds, "How can there be a pure heart in him, who soils it with impure thoughts as a mirror is darkened by dust?" Do you see then, the inexpressible height of which the religion of Christ stands above all other faiths and worldly sophistries? He who only thinks about evil, even though he does not commit any evil, is at fault before God and before his own soul. For he offends God and loses his soul. To be a Christian, in the proper sense, means to invest enormous effort on cleansing evil thoughts from one's heart and mind. What kind of effort is that? There exists a complete study about this, which in our days became completely locked away even for us Christians, and the one enormous actual experience of holy men and women who justified that study. To cleanse oneself from these wicked and impure thoughts, the root of all evil, was the goal of all the great ascetics, hermits and silentaries.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in death:

1. How He Who resurrected from the dead, hangs on the cross, a lifeless body;
2. How He died for our sake so that we would have more abundant life and more abundant truth about immortal life.

HOMILY

-About Christian as kings and priests-

"You made them a kingdom and priests for God"(Revelation 5:10).

The Lord Jesus wants to make all men similar to Himself. As the Son of God, He wants all men to become the adopted sons of God. As a King, He wants them to be co-kings with Him. As a Priest, to be co-priests with Him. As Almighty, to share in His strength. As Eternal, to share in His immortality. As Holy, to share in His holiness. As the Resurrected One, to all be the children of the resurrection. This, the Lord desired and that is why He descended to earth: to separate us from the animals and to elevate us above the life of the animals and to give us dignity over His visible creation, a dignity which Adam had in Paradise before the Fall. Because of this, His love for mankind and His salvatory plan for all people, the Lord was crucified on the cross by the Jewish elders. And even from us Christians today, He reaped the thorns of ingratitude and misunderstanding countless times. We show ourselves to be ungrateful and unreasonable whenever we undermine and trample His commandments. By his sins every sinner plait a new wreath of thorns and places it on His Sacred Head. When did He ever offend us, that we did this to Him? When did He ever think evil about anyone of us, that we return Him evil? He lowered Himself into our fetid pit where we have become accustomed to live with snakes and scorpions and pulled us higher to the heights, to light and purity in the kingdom. He wants to make us kings and priests, and we drive away His saving hand and return to the pit with snakes and scorpions.

O brethren, enough and more than enough of this humiliation of Him and destruction of ourselves. Let us firmly grab the hand of our Savior and follow Him. He desires good for us. He does good for us. For our good, He suffered. He is our One and Only Friend Who does not change.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYR EUSTRATIUS OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Eustratius was very wealthy and, being touched with love for Christ, distributed his entire estate for the sake of Christ and entered the monastery of Pecor and was tonsured a monk. When the Polovtsians waged war against Kiev in 1097 A.D., they plundered the monastery and slew many Christians, including monks. Eustratius, alone, with some of the faithful, were sold into slavery to a Jew in the city of Khorsum [Chresom]. This Jew ridiculed the Faith of Christ and attempted to coerce the Christians into embracing the Jewish religion. Seeing that they had no other alternative, they all agreed to starve themselves to death and not to deny the True Faith. Eustratius encouraged the Christians to follow that decision. They all died of hunger; some after three days, some after four and some after seven. Being accustomed to fasting, Eustratius, alone, remained alive and endured fourteen days without food. The Jew, angered because he lost money with which he purchased the slaves, took out his revenge on Eustratius by nailing him to a cross. Eustratius praised God from the cross and prophesied a severe and imminent death for the Jew. Wild with rage, the Jew pierced him with a spear. The saint of God gave up his soul to his Savior. His body was thrown into the sea, but it floated to the surface. Great miracles occurred over this martyr's body. Shortly after the death of Eustratius, the Byzantine emperor decreed that the Jews of the city of Khorsum be punished for their wickedness toward Christians. This tormentor of Christians was hung on a tree and received the reward of Judas.

2. VENERABLE HILARION, THE NEW CONFESSOR

Hilarion was the abbot of a monastery of Pelekit, near Hellespont. He glowed as the sun with the spirit of God, healed people and expelled evil spirits. This man of God suffered at the time when Leo the Armenian began the Iconoclastic persecution. With forty of his monks, Hilarion was sent into exile near Ephesus and died there in prison and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in 754 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE HESYCHIUS OF JERUSALEM

A presbyter and profound theologian, Hesychius was a disciple of St. Gregory the Theologian and a contemporary of St. Euthymius the Great. One should read his glorious work "Concerning Sobriety in Prayer." He died peacefully in the year 434 A.D.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR BOYAN, BULGARIAN PRINCE

Boyan was the son of Krutogan and the nephew of Grubash. Boyan confessed his faith in Christ; however, his brother Milomir was a pagan. By decree of his brother, Boyan was beheaded for the True Faith in the year 827 A.D.

5. THE MIRACULOUS OCCURRENCE OF TAXIOTIS

Taxiotis was a soldier from Carthage. He spent his entire life in grievous sins but finally repented, left the military service and lived a God-pleasing life. While he was with his wife on his estate near the city, he committed adultery with the wife of his farm worker. Afterwards, he was bitten by a snake and died immediately. Taxiotis was dead for six hours after which he arose. Then, on the fourth day, he spoke and related how and what kind of level of judgment he had passed through until he came to the level of judgment [Mitarstvo] for adultery. There, he fell into the dark abode of demons from which he was led out by an angel who attested on his behalf and was sent back in the flesh to repent for his latest sin. He repented for forty days, going from church to church, beating his head against the doors and thresholds, always crying and telling of the terrible sufferings which sinners undergo in the other world. He implored men not to sin but to repent for those sins already committed. On the fortieth day, with rejoicing, Taxiotis took up habitation into the Kingdom of the Merciful God.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TAXIOTIS THE SOLDIER

Throughout all of Carthage, Taxiotis sobbed,
Telling to all, the horrors seen:
The horrors, O brethren, what my soul saw!
O malodorous abyss where my soul descended!
O monsters terrible, and mud and shrieks!
O weeping without tears, wailing and screaming!
Not six hours did I think, but a hundred years,
In the world of Hades, that, an inhabitant I was!
Until a radiant angel, a guarantee for me offered,
Raised and lowered me near Carthage,
That I, he said, in the body be clothed again;
For my latest misdeed, to repent.
When, upon the body, the smelly corpse I gazed,
My strength left me and my joy perished:
This smelly corpse, O, how can I enter?
How, in this loathsome carrion, to be clothed?
O, how, until now, could I have in it remained?
For pleasure, that garbage, my soul to lose?
O, radiant angel, spare me pain,
Force me not, anymore, into that fetid shame!
At my crying out, the angel, angry became:
Who in the body sins, in the body repents!
Thus, sternly he said and, added this:
Either, into the body you will, or into Hades again?
When Hades he mentioned, I fell painfully silent,
Rapidly to the body I approached and into the body crawled.
Forty days for repentance, I have,
And a lesson to all and a warning.
Repent, O brethren, quickly repent,
With your sins into Hades, do not stumble.
Repent quickly, only repent,
Repentance will not be allowed you there.
Taxiotis is relating to you what he, himself, saw
O, fetid abyss, where my soul descended!

REFLECTION

St. Simeon the New Theologian, in speaking about a handsome twenty year old youth, George by name, who, despite his beauty and youth and living among the conceited of the world, recognized the path of salvation and was enlightened by spiritual wisdom, concludes with these words: "Do you understand how youth does not hinder nor does old age help a man, if he does not have reason and the fear of God." What prevented the young Apostle John from believing in Christ the Lord? What were the benefits of age to the Jewish elders when they were blinded in mind and in their blindness sentenced the Son of God to death? Nothing, nothing prevents youth in the young, even in our time, from giving their faith and love to Christ, who created them out of love. Nothing benefits the age of the aged in our time if their souls are poisoned with maliciousness toward Christ. Young and old bodies are nothing more than a new and an old garment of the soul. One or the other of these garments can conceal a healthy or a sick soul. Our goal is a healthy and clean soul.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in death:

1. How all of nature trembled when He gave up the Spirit, as though to protest against this criminal act of the race of men;
2. How the earth quaked, the sun darkened, the rocks were split, the veil of the temple was rent and the graves were opened.

HOMILY

-About the horror of nature at the death of Christ-

"The earth quaked, rocks were split" (St. Matthew 27:51).

O, what a terrible reproach against mankind! Even dead nature recognized Him Whom men were unable to recognize. All mute things trembled and began to protest, each in its own way and in its own language. The mute earth quakes--that is its language. The stones split apart--that is their language. The sun withholds its light--that is its language. All of creation in its own way protested. For all of creation is submissive to Him, as it was to Adam at one time in Paradise, because all of creation recognizes Him as it did Adam in Paradise. How is it that irrational creation knew Him and was obedient to Him, we do not know. It is some kind of inner instinct of irrational creation, which came to them from the word of God, by which they were created. That instinct of irrational creation is more valuable than the mind of man when darkened by sin. Of all the things which are in existence, nothing is more blind than the mind of man when darkened by sin. Not only does he not see what was created to be seen, rather, he sees that which is contrary to being, contrary to God, and contrary to the truth. These are the degrees of the blindness; beneath blindness; these are numbers below zero. This is man of lower creation. For when the priests of God in Jerusalem did not recognize their God, the storms and winds recognized Him; vegetation and animals recognized Him; the seas, the rivers, the earth, the stones, the stars, the sun and even the demons recognized Him. O what kind of shame it is for mankind!

The earth quaked, the rocks split, the sun darkened, as much in anger as in sorrow. All creation grieved over the pain of the Son of God, in Whose pain the priests in Jerusalem rejoiced. Protests and sorrow and fear! The whole of creation was frightened at the death of Him Who cried to them arise from nothing and rejoice in your being. As though it wanted to say: with whom do we remain and who will now uphold us when the Almighty gives up the Spirit?

O brethren, let us be ashamed of this protest, these sorrows and this fear of the mutes of creation! With repentance let us cry out to the Lord, the Victor: forgive, O Compassionate Lord, for indeed, whenever we sin and offend You, we do not know what we are doing.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 29 -

1. SAINT MARK, CONFESSOR AND BISHOP OF ARETHUSA IN SYRIA

We are told about Mark's suffering by St. Gregory the Theologian and by Blessed Theodorit. According to this report, Mark, during the reign of Emperor Constantine, destroyed a pagan temple and converted many to the Faith of Christ. When Julian ascended the throne and, shortly thereafter, apostatized from the Faith of Christ, a citizen of Arethusa then also denied Christ and reverted to paganism. Then they rose up against Mark because he destroyed their temple, seeking that he either rebuild the temple or pay a large sum of money. Since the aged Mark refused to do either of the two, he was flogged, mocked and dragged through the streets. After that they severed his ears with a thin but strong thread. They then stripped him, rubbed him with honey, and left him tied to a tree in the heat of summer so that he would be bitten by wasps, mosquitoes, and hornets. The martyr of Christ endured all without moaning. Mark was very old, but in his countenance he shone like an angel. The pagans reduced the price for their temple even more and finally sought from Mark an insignificant sum, which he could have easily given, but he refused to give even one coin for this purpose. His patience made an enormous impression on the citizens, and they began to admire him for it and to feel sorry for him. They then lowered the cost of the temple to practically nothing, in order to allow him to live. Finally, they permitted him to go free, and one by one they all received instruction from him and returned to the Faith of Christ. At the same time, in the city of Heliopolis at the foot of Mt. Lebanon Cyril a deacon, suffered for a similar act. During the time when Christianity enjoyed freedom, Cyril destroyed some idols and under Julian the Apostate, was brutally tortured. So embittered were the pagans against him that when they killed him, they tore and ripped open his entrails with their teeth. The same day on which St. Cyril suffered, many others also suffered. The spiteful pagans carved up their bodies into pieces, mixed them with barley and feed it to the swine. Punishment reached them swiftly: all of their teeth fell out and an unbearable stench emitted from their mouths.

2. VENERABLE JOHN THE HERMIT

John was the son of Juliana, a Christian woman in Armenia. As a young boy, he left his mother and withdrew into the wilderness, completely enflamed with love toward Christ the Lord. In the wilderness, he first surrendered himself to the guidance of a spiritual director, Pharmutius, who had been found so worthy before God that an angel of God brought him bread daily. Afterwards, the young John distanced himself and withdrew into solitude. He lowered himself into a dry well where he spent ten years in fasting, prayer and vigils. St. Pharmutius brought bread from the angel and gave it to him. So that John would not become proud, the angel of God did not want to give bread to the young John personally, but rather through his spiritual father Pharmutius. After ten years of difficult mortification in the well, St. John presented himself to the Lord. His relics revealed itself to be wonder-working. He lived and was glorified by God and men in the fourth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE LORD, HERO OF HEROES

The Hero Lord, all heroes gathers He,
All who can maintain the Faith,
Faithful to God, and to death remain;
And who can, sufferings to endure
Offering thanksgiving to God
And of their sufferings being proud;
And, who others can forgive,
And insults to receive as praise;
And still, who others can instruct
From the sinful path to righteousness return
With a sorrowful, compassionate soul,
And who can be merciful,
In the joy of others, to rejoice,
And with a weeping heart to cry;
And who can, himself restrain
From evil deeds, words and thoughts,
From over-indulging in drink and food
Who, his body, does not please
But considers it a temporary dustbin
On the battlefield, from which he struggles
His God-given soul to preserve,
To preserve the Christian Faith,
So that into the city of Paradise to enter,
Where the Kingdom of the Lord of Heroes is,
Where, with heroes, the Hero reigns,
With heroes, not of this world.

REFLECTION

Spiritists of our day accept every manifestation from the spiritual world as though sent by God, and immediately they boast that God has been "revealed" to them. I knew an eighty year old monk whom everyone respected as a great spiritual director. To my question: "Have you ever in your life seen anything from the spiritual world?", the monk answered me, "No, never, praise be to God's Mercy." Seeing that I was astonished at this, he said, "I have constantly prayed to God that nothing appear to me, so that, by chance, I would not succumb to pride and receive a fallen devil as an angel. Thus far, God has heard my prayers." This recorded example shows how humble and cautious the elders were. The devil, clothed in the light of an angel, appeared to a certain monk and said to him: "I am the Archangel Gabriel and I am sent to you." To that, the brother responded, "Think! Were you not sent to someone else, for I am not worthy to see an angel?" The devil instantly became invisible and vanished.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in death:

1. How darkness encompasses everyone;
2. How fear enters into everyone present beneath the cross;
3. How the frightened captain of the guard cried out: **"Truly, this was the Son of God!" (St. Matthew 27:54).**
4. How the prophecy of our Lord's death was fulfilled.

HOMILY

-About the miraculous opening of the graves-

"Tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised" (St. Matthew 27:52).

O, what a great sign! The dead bodies of holy men and women recognized Him, Who, on the cross, died in pain; but the dead souls of the elders of the Jews did not recognize Him. The whole of creation trembled, but only the criminal souls of Anna, Caiphas and Herod did not tremble. Dead saints showed themselves more sensitive than living sinners. How could the dead saints remain indifferent toward their Creator on the cross when not even the dead stones could not remain indifferent? How is it that during this event from which the earth quaked and the sun darkened, the bodies of those righteous could sleep in the graves, those who fulfilled His Dispensation of Old, those who hoped in Him for life, those who prophesied about Him and, with hope in Him, closed their eyes?

O, what a great sign! O, what a great comfort it is for us who hope in the resurrection! For according to our weakness and little faith, we could say, "Truly, Christ is Risen." But will we also be resurrected? Christ resurrected by His Own power but, how shall we resurrect? Who knows if God will resurrect us by His own Power. Here is consolation, here is proof: **"Tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised."** This means that death was unable to annihilate even ordinary man. This means that those who are much lower than Christ are not dead as stones, rather are alive as angels. This means that one day even our bodies will arise from the tombs, that we will live also. All that our Lord said is substantiated and overflowing with countless testimonies. Knowing the weakness of our faith, He proved the prophecy of His resurrection not also by His particular resurrection, but also by His raising many bodies from the tombs at the time of His own death.

O brethren, not one of us will have the least excuse for not believing in life after death.

O Lord, All-Merciful, strengthen the faithful in the Faith and return the unfaithful to the Faith.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE JOHN CLIMACUS

John Climacus is the author of "**The Ladder of Divine Ascent.**" John came to Mt. Sinai as a sixteen year old youth and remained there, first as a novice under obedience, and afterwards as a recluse, and finally as abbot of Sinai until his eightieth year. He died around the year 563 A.D. His biographer, the monk Daniel, says about him: "His body ascended the heights of Sinai, while his soul ascended the heights of heaven." He remained under obedience with his spiritual father, Martyrius, for nineteen years. Anastasius of Sinai, seeing the young John, prophesied that he would become the abbot of Sinai. After the death of his spiritual father, John withdrew into a cave, where he lived a difficult life of asceticism for twenty years. His disciple, Moses, fell asleep one day under the shade of a large stone. John, in prayer in his cell, saw that his disciple was in danger and prayed to God for him. Later on, when Moses returned, he fell on his knees and gave thanks to his spiritual father for saving him from certain death. He related how, in a dream, he heard John calling him and he jumped up and, at that moment, the stone tumbled. Had he not jumped, the stone would have crushed him. At the insistence of the brotherhood, John agreed to become abbot and directed the salvation of the souls of men with zeal and love. From someone John heard a reproach that he talked too much. Not being angered by this, John however remained silent for an entire year and did not utter a word until the brothers implored him to speak and to continue to teach them his God-given wisdom. On one occasion, when six-hundred pilgrims came to the Monastery of Sinai, everyone saw an agile youth in Jewish attire serving at a table and giving orders to other servants and assigning them. All at once, this young man disappeared. When everyone noticed this and began to question it, John said to them, "Do not seek him, for that was Moses the Prophet serving in my place." During the time of his silence in the cave, John wrote many worthwhile books, of which the most glorious is "**The Ladder.**" This book is still read by many, even today. In this book, John describes the method of elevating the soul to God, as ascending a ladder. Before his death, John designated George, his brother in the flesh, as abbot. George grieved much because of his separation from John. Then John said to him, that, if he [John] were found worthy to be near God in the other world, he would pray to Him, that, he, [George], would be taken to heaven that same year. And, so it was. After ten months George succeeded and settled among the citizens of heaven as did his great brother, John.

2. MEMORIAL TO A MONK WHO JOYFULLY DIED AND WHO NEVER JUDGED ANYONE IN HIS LIFE

This monk was lazy, careless, and lacking in his prayer life; but throughout all of his life, he did not judge anyone. While dying, he was happy. When the brethren asked him how is it that with so many sins, you die happy? He replied, "I now see angels who are showing me a letter with my numerous sins. I said to them, Our Lord said: **'stop judging and you will not be judged'** (St. Luke 6:37). I have never judged anyone, and I hope in the mercy of God that He will not judge me." And the angels tore up the paper. Upon hearing this, the monks were astonished and learned from it.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN OF THE LADDER (CLIMACUS)

As a kind of torch on Sinai, the Mount,
John was glowing in heavenly light
Subduing the body, subdued his thoughts,
Thirty steps, he numbered toward victory.
Miraculous strategy, wonderful tactic
As a legacy, to the spiritual warrior he gave
The spiritual warfare, who desires to learn
And in this warfare to gloriously conquer.
"The Ladder," all miraculous, by the Spirit written,
After the dreadful strife was ended,
When John the Victor, the world from himself shed,
As a precious gift, to the brethren he brought it.
An epic poem, that is the soul of man,
When from dust, toward heaven it desires to climb,
An awesome epic poem of struggle and suffering,
A sparkling epic poem of faith and hoping.
This, John, to us gave, illumined by God,
Weapons, all-glowing, to you and to me.
And now before the Lord, John prays
That the Lord be pleased to send us help
When, to Him, by the Ladder we climb.
That to us, His hand He extends, that we
May to Him arrive.

REFLECTION

If humility before men is necessary for the sake of being exalted before God and temporal effort for the sake of eternal life, what do you care if someone wags their head and laughs at your humility? John the Silentary [the Hesychast] was a bishop in Ascalon for ten years. Seeing that the honors of men hindered him, he disguised himself as a simple monk and entered the Monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified, where he was assigned to gather wood and to boil lentils for the laborers. When he was recognized, he closed himself in a cell, where he lived for forty-seven years, feeding on vegetables only. This is how the Fathers avoided worldly honors, for which many in our day, in neck-breaking struggle, squander their souls away to dust and ashes.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in death:

1. How His body is taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea;
2. How Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the Body of the Lord in a pure linen cloth, anointed Him with ointments and placed Him in a new tomb;
3. How faithful and unafraid were these two distinguished men among the many enemies of Christ in the midst of general fear and denials.

HOMILY

-About recognizing the Son of Man among the common darkness-

"Truly, this was the Son of God" (St. Matthew 27:54).

These words were spoken by the captain who carried out his duties conscientiously as a soldier. Under orders of his superiors, he had to guard the body of Christ on Golgotha. Externally, like a machine, but internally, a soul wide awake.

He, a Roman soldier, a pagan, and an idolater, saw all that had occurred at the time of the death of Christ the Lord, and cried out: **"Truly, this was the Son of God."** Not knowing about the One God and not knowing the Law and the Prophets, he immediately comprehended that which the priests of the One God and authorities of the Law and the Prophets were unable to comprehend! On this occasion, the word of God came true. **"I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see, might see, and those who do see, might become blind" (St. John 9:39).** Truly, he who was blind in the spirit saw and those who thought they could see were completely blinded. Was it not possible that the elders of the Jews did not see the darkened sun, did not feel the earthquake, did not notice how the rocks were split, did not see that the veil in the Temple was rent, did not recognize many of the saints who came out from opened graves and appeared in Jerusalem? They saw all of this and all of them accurately witnessed all of this. Nevertheless, their spirits remained blind and their hearts, stony. All of these manifestations, the awesome and the unusual, they probably interpreted as the unbelieving would do today - accidents and illusions. The pagans of all times interpret everything as accidents or self-deceptions whenever the finger of God appears to reprimand men, to direct or to inform them. The Roman captain Longinus, which was the soldier's name, saw all that occurred without prejudice and beneath the cross confessed his faith in the Son of God. His exclamation was not wrested accidentally from his frightened heart. But that was his confession of faith, for which he later on laid down his life to embrace a better life in the Kingdom of Christ.

O brethren, how great is this Roman captain, who upon seeing the lifeless Lord between thieves crucified on the dunghill of Golgotha, recognized Him as God and confessed Him as God. O brethren, how petty are those Christians who recognize the Lord as resurrected, as Glorified, as the Victor and the Victor-bearer through thousands of His saints but, nevertheless, retain in their hearts doubt like a poisonous serpent who poisons them every day and buries their lives in eternal darkness.

O crucified and resurrected Lord, have mercy on us and save us!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MARCH - 31 -

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR HYPATIUS THE BISHOP OF GANGRA

Hypatius was born in Cilicia and was the bishop of Gangra. He was present at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325. A.D.] and was renowned throughout because of his pious and saintly life and his miracle-working. The Emperor Constantius ordered that a likeness of Hypatius be made during the saint's lifetime. The emperor kept this likeness in his palace as a weapon against all adverse powers. Once upon returning from Constantinople, Hypatius was attacked in a narrow gorge by Novatian heretics and, along with others, was hurled to the ground in mud. At that moment a woman from that group struck him in the head with a stone and, thus, the saint died. Immediately that woman went insane and took that same stone and struck herself with it. When they took her to the grave of St. Hypatius, he interceded before God on her behalf. She was healed by the great compassionate soul of Hypatius and lived the remainder of her life in repentance and prayer. St. Hypatius died and took up habitation in the eternal Kingdom of Christ the God, in the year 326 A.D.

2. SAINT JONAH, METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW

Jonah was born in the province of Kostrom. In his twelfth year he was tonsured a monk and as such lived for a long time in the Simonov Monastery in Moscow. At the time of Metropolitan Photius, Jonah became Bishop of Ryazn. When Photius died, Jonah was elected as metropolitan and sent to the patriarch in Constantinople for approval and consecration. At the same time, Isidorus, a Bulgarian by descent, outwitted Jonah and arrived before him in Constantinople and was consecrated as the Metropolitan of the Russians. Jonah returned to his cathedral in Ryazn. Isidorus, the malicious one, ended his incumbency of the Metropolitan See nefariously. Isidorus attended the Council of Florence [1439 A.D.] and then, after three years, returned to Moscow. Everyone attacked him as an apostate from Orthodoxy and banished him. It is unknown where he ended his life. Jonah, the good and wise shepherd, ascended the throne of the Metropolitan See. He was a great worker of miracles, "a discernor," and a spiritual director. When the Agarians surrounded Moscow, Jonah repelled them through his prayers. In his later years he wished that he could be afflicted by an illness so that he could suffer pain and that, through pain, completely purify himself before his departure to the other world. According to his wishes, God permitted a sore on his foot, which was preceded by a vision to a certain priest, James. The saint died from these wounds and took up habitation among the heavenly citizens on March 31, 1461 A.D. Many miracles have occurred over his relics. A certain mute, John by name, was brought before the relics of the saint. John kissed the hand of Jonah and, as he related later, the hand grabbed him by the tongue and he felt a sharp pain. When the hand released his tongue, John returned to those people who brought him and began to talk as though he was never a mute.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR AUDAS

Audas was a bishop of the city of Susa. He was beheaded for Christ in the year 418 A.D. in Persia by Emperor Yezdegird. His deacon, St. Benjamin, was released by the tormentors with the understanding that he would never preach the Gospel again. In the beginning he agreed, but Benjamin could not sustain this in his heart and continued to spread the truth of Christ among the people. For this Benjamin was captured and killed three years after St. Audas in the year 421 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE APOLLONIUS

Apollonius was a renowned Egyptian ascetic. In his fifteenth year he renounced the world and withdrew to a mountain where he lived for forty years feeding on vegetation. After that, he established a monastery in which five-hundred monks lived. He died peacefully in the year 395 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TRUTH

Know the truth, the Lord commands,
Who knows the truth, himself does not allow to be enslaved.
To the faithful, truth gives freedom,
And by truth, the faithful rule over the world.
Falsehood and bondage are as a source and river,
Falsehood, forever in bondage, holds the liar.
Falsehood is the midnight darkness which leads astray
And by this wayward path leads men into the abyss.
Falsehood shackles one with fear, fear from everyone,
From men and the world and demons evil.
Truth is the light which disperses darkness
And grants freedom to the despondent slave,
Freedom from men, freedom from the world,
Freedom from fear and demons cursed.
Who recognizes truth, freedom, that one receives,
With freedom, even authority over all adversaries.
The cradle for freedom, truth prepares,
For without truth, there is not true freedom.

REFLECTION

St. John of the Ladder says: **"He who in his heart is proud of his tears and secretly condemns those who do not weep is like a man who asks the king for a weapon against his enemy and then commits suicide with it" (Step 7).** If your heart is softened, be it from repentance before God or be it from knowing the boundless love of God toward you, do not become proud toward those whose hearts are still hard and calloused. Remember how long it has been since you had a hard and calloused heart. There were seven brothers who were ailing in a hospital. One of them was restored to health and rose to his feet. He hurried to serve his other brothers with fraternal love and concern so that they too would recover. You be like that brother also. Consider that all men are your brothers, sick brothers. If you feel that God has given you health before them, know that it was given to you through mercy, so that even you as a healthy person may serve others who are sick. Of what do we have to be proud? As though good health comes from ourselves alone and not from God. As though a mud hole can cleanse itself and not from a source deeper and cleaner.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in death:

1. How His body lies peacefully in a grave;
2. How He descended in the Spirit to the souls in Hades in order to redeem the souls of the forefathers.

HOMILY

-About joy after sorrow-

"So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice" (St. John 16:22).

The father steps up to the gallows and his sons are crying around him. Instead of the sons comforting him, he comforts his sons. Something similar to this happened to the Lord and His disciples. Walking toward His bitter death, the Lord is more saddened because of the grief of His disciples, rather than by that which He has to endure. He caresses them with consolation and encourages them with the prophecy of the new and impending vision: **"But I will see you again."** This is a prophecy about the resurrection. Many times our Lord prophesied His death, but when He prophesied His death, He also prophesied His resurrection. Nothing unforeseen ever did happen to Him. He did not prophesy about Himself only, but also about them [the disciples]. They will be in great sorrow as a woman when she gives birth and endures pain. As a woman forgets her pain and rejoices when she gives birth **"for a child has been born into the world" (St. John 16:22)**, so will it be with them. In their consciousness Christ the Lord was not completely in the form of the God-Man. As long as they had known Him as a sufferer and mortal man, they only knew Him partially; until then, the pain of birth lasts in their souls. But when they see Him again, resurrected and alive, miraculous and almighty, Lord over all things in heaven and on earth, the pain and sorrow will cease and joy will appear in their hearts. For Christ will be completely formed in their consciousness as the God-Man and then they will know Him in His fullness and in His totality. Only then will He be totally born for them.

So with us brethren, as long as we know Him only from His birth to His death on Golgotha, we know the Lord Jesus partially. We will know Him completely only when we know Him as the Resurrected One, the Victor over death.

O Lord All-victorious, have mercy on us and by Your resurrection cause us to rejoice as You comforted and made joyful Your disciples.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL

APRIL -1-

1. SAINT MARY THE EGYPTIAN

The biography of this wonderful saint was written by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Once, during the Honorable Fast [Lenten Season], a certain .priest-monk (Heiromonk), the Elder Zosimus, withdrew into the wilderness beyond the Jordan, a twenty-day trek. Suddenly, he caught sight of a human being with a withered and naked body whose hair was as white as snow and who began to flee from the sight of Zosimus. The elder ran for a long while until this person crouched down in a brook and cried out: "Abba Zosimus forgive me for the sake of the Lord. I cannot face you for I am a naked woman." Zosimus then tossed his outer garment to her which she wrapped around herself and then showed herself to him. The elder was frightened upon hearing his name spoken from the mouth of this woman he did not know. Following his prolonged insistence, the woman related her life story. She was born in Egypt and at the age of twelve began to live a life of debauchery in Alexandria where she spent seventeen years in this perverted way of life. Driven by the adulterous flame of the flesh, one day she boarded a boat which was sailing for Jerusalem. Arriving at the Holy City, she wanted to enter the church in order to venerate the Honorable Cross but some invisible force restrained her and prevented her from entering the church. In great fear, she gazed upon the icon of the All-Holy Mother of God in the vestibule and prayed that she be allowed to enter the church to venerate the Honorable Cross, all the while confessing her sinfulness and uncleanness and promising that she would go wherever the All-Pure One would direct her. She was then permitted to enter the church. Having venerated the Cross she again entered the vestibule and, before the icon, gave thanks to the Mother of God. At that very moment she heard a voice saying: "If you cross over Jordan you will find real peace!" Immediately she purchased three loaves of bread and started out for the Jordan where she arrived that same evening. The next day she received Holy Communion in the Monastery of St. John and crossed over the Jordan river. She remained in the wilderness for forty-eight years in great torment, fear and struggle with passionate thoughts as though with wild beasts. She fed on vegetation. Afterward, when she stood for prayer, Zosimus saw her levitate in the air. She begged him to bring her Holy Communion the following year on the shore of the Jordan where she would then come to receive it. The following year, Zosimus arrived on the shore of the Jordan in the evening with Holy Communion. He wondered how this saint would cross the Jordan. At that moment, in the light of the moon, he saw her as she approached the river, made the sign of the cross over it and walked upon the water as though upon dry land. After Zosimus administered Holy Communion to her, she begged him to come the following year to the same brook where they had first met. Zosimus came and discovered her lifeless body on that spot. Above her head in the sand was written: "Abba Zosimus, bury the body of the humble Mary on this site; render dust to dust. I died on April 1, the same night of the saving-suffering of Christ, after having received Communion of the Divine Mysteries." From this inscription Zosimus first learned her name and the other and awesome miracle was that, she, on that same night the previous year, when she received Holy Communion, arrived at this brook which took him twenty days to travel. Thus, Zosimus buried the body of this wonderful saint, Mary the Egyptian. When he returned to the monastery Zosimus related the entire history of her life and the miracles which he had personally witnessed. Thus, the Lord knows how to glorify penitent sinners. St. Mary is also commemorated on the Fifth Sunday of the Honorable Fast (Fifth Sunday in Lent). The Church holds her up as an example to the faithful during these fast days as an incentive for repentance. She died about the year 530 A.D.

2. SAINT MELETION, THE BISHOP OF SARDIS IN ASIA MINOR

Meletion was a celebrated shepherd of the second-century Church. Governing with great ability, he endeavored to gather all the books of Sacred Scripture into a single Codex. By his meekness and piety, Meletion again labored to restore peace in the Church of Laodicea, which arose over the controversy regarding the celebration of Pascha (The Feast of the Resurrection). Besides this, he defended Christianity against the pagans. He traveled to Rome about the year 170 A.D. and submitted to Emperor Marcus Aurelius a written Apologia (Defense) of the Faith and of the Christian Church. St. Meletion, this learned, pious and zealous man, died peacefully in the Lord in the year 177 A.D.

3. VENERABLE PROCOPIUS, THE CZECH

Procopius was born in Hotish, today's Czech Republic. He was ordained a priest and retreated to a mountain to live according to the model of eastern hermits. The Duke (Herceg) Ulrich accidentally came upon Procopius and assisted him in establishing the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner by the Sazava river. This holy man died in the year 1053 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MARY THE EGYPTIAN

**Penitent wonderful, self-tormentor,
Mary hid herself from the face of men.**

**Oh yes, sinful me,
By passion, darkened.**

**Passions are beasts which eat at our heart,
In us as serpents, secretly they weave a nest.**

**Oh yes, sinful me,
By passion consumed!**

**In order to save sinners, You suffered O Christ,
Now, do not loathe impure me!**

**Hearken to the cry of Mary,
Of all, the most-sinful!**

**The Lord showed compassion, Mary He healed,
Her darkened soul, He whitened as snow.**

**Thanks be to You, O All-Good One,
Oh Lord, most dear!**

**An impure vessel You cleansed and,
With gold you gilded it,**

**Filled it to overflowing with Your grace -
That is true mercy,**

To you O God, be glory!

**And Mary became radiant with the Spirit
As an angel of God, by strength girded,**

By Your power, O Christ

Mercy, Most pure!

**What smells so in the awesome wilderness,
As beautiful incense in a chest of the temple?**

**That, Mary breathes -
With holiness, she exudes!**

REFLECTION

Why is it that much is said and written about the sufferings of holy men and holy women? Because the saints, alone, are considered victors. Can anyone be a victor without conflict, pain and suffering? In ordinary earthly combat, no one can be considered victorious nor heroic who has not been in combat, tortured much or suffered greatly. The more so in spiritual combat where the truth is known and where self-boasting not only does not help at all but, indeed, hinders it. He who does not engage in combat for the sake of Christ, either with the world, with the devil or with one's self, how can he be counted among the soldiers of Christ? How, then, can it be with Christ's co-victors? St. Mary spoke about her savage spiritual combat to the Elder Zosimus: "For the first seventeen years in this wilderness I struggled with my deranged sexual desires as though with fierce beasts. I desired to eat meat and fish which I had in abundance in Egypt. I also desired to drink wine and here, I did not have even water to drink. I desired to hear lustful songs. I cried and beat my breasts. I prayed to the All-Pure Mother of God to banish such thoughts from me. When I had sufficiently cried and beat my breasts, it was then that I saw a light encompassing me on all sides and a certain miraculous peace filled me."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in death:

1. How the lifeless body of Him lay in the grave, Who, while living, gave life to the dead;
2. How even in death, the hatred of His enemies rage against Him; How His disciples locked themselves in a house **"for fear of the Jews" (St. John 20:19).**

HOMILY

-About the fulfillment of the great prophecy-

"Like a lamb led to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7).

Throughout the many centuries of time the discerning Prophet Isaiah foresaw the awesome sacrifice on Golgotha. From afar he saw the Lord Jesus Christ led to the slaughter as a lamb is led to the slaughter. A lamb permits itself to be led to the slaughter as it is led to the pasture: defenseless, without fear and without malice. Thus, Our Lord Christ was led to the slaughter without defense, without fear and without malice. Neither does He say: "Men, do not do this!" Neither does He question: "Why are you doing this to Me?" Neither does He condemn anyone. Neither does He protest. Neither does He become angry. Neither does He think evilly of His judges. When blood poured out over Him from the thorny wreath, He was silent. When His face was soiled from being spat upon, He was silent. When His Cross became heavy along the way, He endured. When His pain became unbearable on the Cross, He did not complain to men but to the Father. When He breathed His last, He directed His gaze and sigh toward heaven and not toward earth. For the source of His strength is heaven and not earth. The source of His consolation is in God and not in men. His true homeland is the Heavenly Kingdom and not the earthly kingdom.

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (St. John 1:29). This was the first cry of St. John the Baptist when he saw the Lord. And, behold, now on Golgotha that prophecy was fulfilled. Behold, under the weight of the sins of the entire world, the Lamb of God lay slaughtered and lifeless.

O brethren, this is a costly sacrifice even for our sins. The blood of this sinless and meek Lamb was destined for all times and all generations, from the first to the last person on earth. Christ also felt the pains on the Cross for our sins even those of the present day. He also wept in the Garden of Gethsemane for our wickedness, our weakness and our sinfulness. He also destined His blood for us. Brethren let us not then despise this indescribable costly price by which we have been redeemed. Because of these sacrifices of Christ we, indeed, have some worth as people. Without these sacrifices, or if we disavow these sacrifices, our worth, by itself alone, is equal to nothing. It is equal to smoke without a flame or a cloud without light.

O Lord, unequalled in mercy, have mercy on us also!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 2 -

1. VENERABLE TITUS, THE MIRACLE-WORKER

From his youth, Titus loved Christ the Lord and detested the vanities of the world. Because of this, he retreated from the world, entered a monastery and received the Great Angelic Habit [The Great Schema-The Angelic Face]. Not feeling any remorse, he dedicated himself to the somber and narrow path of monasticism. Through great patience, he attained two basic virtues: that of humility and obedience. In these virtues, he surpassed "not only the brethren, but also all men." From his youth he preserved the purity of his soul and body. At the time of the Iconoclastic heresy he proved himself to be an unwavering pillar of the Church of God. Because of his great humility and purity, God bestowed upon him the gift of performing miracles, both during his life-time and after his death. When he was translated to the Lord he left behind a countless number of disciples. He died peacefully in the ninth century.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS AMPHIANUS AND EDESIUS

These two young men were blood brothers from the city of Patara of distinguished but pagan parents. While they were studying the secular sciences in the city of Beirut, they were enlightened by the Spirit of God, and acknowledging the falsehood of paganism, discerned the truth of Christianity. When they returned home they could no longer live with their pagan parents and kinsmen and secretly fled to Caesarea in Palestine to the presbyter Pamphilius, renowned for his sanctity and spiritual learning. With Pamphilius, they studied the Law of God day and night and practiced Christian asceticism. It is said of Pamphilius that he was twenty years old according to the flesh but, in understanding and generosity, he was a hundred years old. When a persecution began during the reign of Maximian, many Christians fled the city and hid themselves. Others, willingly and rejoicingly, gave themselves into the hands of the persecutors in order to suffer for the Name of Him, Who first suffered for them. Amphianus was among the latter. Unafraid, he entered a pagan temple where Prince Urban was offering sacrifices to the idols, grabbed the prince by the hand which was holding the sacrifice and cried to him to refrain from serving and making sacrificial offerings to dead idols and to acknowledge the True God. Some of the pagans who heard these words and witnessing the great courage of Amphianus, repented and embraced the Faith of Christ. The enraged prince subjected Amphianus to torture. Among the other tortures, they wrapped the legs of Amphianus with cotton and set them on fire. When he remained alive, they tossed his body into the sea with a stone around his neck. The sea became turbulent and hurled his martyred body back into the city. At first, Edesius was sent to a copper mine in Palestine and was later taken to Egypt. In Alexandria, Edesius was filled with holy zeal against a certain Prince Hierocles who, in the market place, assembled Christian nuns, maidens and virtuous women and handed them over to the most shameful perverts for derision. Edesius, filled with holy zeal, struck the disgraceful prince. For that, he was tortured and drowned in the sea as was his brother Amphianus. As two innocent lambs, they were sacrificed for Christ about the year 306 A.D. and were translated to the glorious mansions of the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT AMPHIANUS AND EDESIUS

As a sacrifice, two brothers offered themselves to God,
Despising the decaying world; a dead corpse,
Amphianus and Edesius, blood brothers both,
In sufferings, wonderful brothers, pleasing to Christ.
He who has faith in God, does not value the world,
To a dead soul, the world can replace God.
Whoever has love for Christ; of death, he is not afraid,
Among the immortal and even before death, he is already numbered.
Whoever considers death as the gloomy end; the end of the inglorious,
That one must consider himself a slave of despair.
Death; the martyrs considered the veil of heaven,
An example they gave; that to fear death is not necessary.
That there is no heaven, O man, do not fear
But, fear the Dreadful Judgment which heaven prepares.
For a sinner it would be easier if heaven did not exist,
That is why the sinner with anger questions:
But heaven, where is it?
O sinner, heaven is not there, where you are,
Together, you and heaven will never be.

REFLECTION

"It is better to be a simpleton and to approach God with love than to be a know-it-all and, at the same time, be an enemy of God." These are the words of the priest-martyr, St. Iraneaus of Lyon. The truth of these words have been confirmed at all times and is also confirmed in our time. One thing must be added to this, namely, that the lovers of God are not simpletons because they know God well enough that they are able to love Him. Of all human knowledge, this knowledge is more important and greater. To this must be added that the enemies of God cannot be more knowledgeable, even though they consider themselves as such, because their knowledge is unavoidably chaotic, for it does not have a source and does not have order. For the source and order of all knowledge is God. Some of the saints, such as Paul the Simple, did not know how to read or write yet with the strength of their spirit and divine love surpassed the entire world. Whosoever approaches God with love, that person is not capable of crime. Knowledge without love toward God is motivated by the spirit of criminality and war. St. Euthymius the Great taught: "Have love; for what salt is to food, love is to every virtue." Every virtue is tasteless and cold if it is not seasoned and warmed by divine love.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in Hades:

1. How His plan for salvation is all abundant, encompassing all generations and all ages from the beginning to the end;
2. How He came to earth in the flesh, not only for the sake of those who lived on earth then but also for the sake of those who will live and for those who have lived;
3. How He, while His lifeless body lay in the tomb, descended into Hades with His soul and announced salvation and redemption to the fettered.

HOMILY

-About the Living God and about His living children-

"So then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8).

Whose are we while we live? We are the Lord's. Whose are we after we die? We are the Lord's. Whose are the righteous? They are the Lord's. Whose are the sinners? They are the Lord's. The Lord embraces all, both the living and the dead, those of the past, those of the present and those of the future. No one is so all-embracing as is the Lord Jesus. Who, of those so-called philanthropists of mankind, teachers, leaders or enlighteners ever attempted to perform any good for the dead? This can be decisively answered: never and no one! This thought alone would be ridiculous even in the eyes of the world - to do something good for the dead? This is amusing to all those who think that death is mightier than God and that which death swallows up is destroyed for ever. To be concerned about the dead, to do good for the dead ceased to be amusing since the revelation of the Lord Jesus, Who revealed that He is God, the God of the living; Who revealed in His works, by descending into Hades to redeem and to save the souls of the righteous from the time of Adam to the time of His death on the cross.

All-embracing is our All-glorious Lord, Who, by His discerning thoughts, reflects about everyone and sees everyone born of women; those who are above the graves and those who are in the graves. So it is with His love, for He embraces all the souls of the righteous regardless of the time and place which conceals them. Finally, even by His labors, for He labors for all of them, to redeem all of them, to save them, and to lead them into the kingdom and to glorify them before the face of His Heavenly Father, the Life-giving Spirit and the myriads of holy angels.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT NICETAS THE CONFESSOR

Nicetas was born in Bithynia in the city of Caesarea. His father, Filaret, after the death of his spouse, was tonsured a monk while Nicetas remained with his paternal grandmother. After reaching maturity and completing all of his studies, Nicetas entered the Monastery of Medikion, where the Abbot Nicephorus tonsured him a monk. After seven years of hardship and mortification, Patriarch Tarasius ordained him a priest (Heiromonk). Following the deaths of Abbot Nicephorus and Athanasius, the faithful companion of Nicetas, the monastic brotherhood elected him as abbot, against his will. St. Nicetas was a holy example and model of life and asceticism to his brethren for many years. When Leo V, the Armenian, was crowned emperor, after the pious Irene and the right-believing Emperors Nicephorus and Michael, the Iconoclastic struggle was again enflamed. The emperor deposed Patriarch Nicephorus and later banished him into exile and, in his place, elevated the heretic Theodotus Cassiteras, a man of impure life. Nicetas was also imprisoned and tortured but he remained steadfast in his Orthodoxy. He was led from prison to prison and suffered hunger, thirst, chills, oppressive heat and ridicule. He did not permit himself to waver. What particularly annoyed him was the laughter and scorn of a certain Nicholas. One night, Nicholas' deceased father appeared to him in a dream and rebuked Nicholas saying: "Withdraw from Nicetas, the servant of God." From that moment on Nicholas repented and did not annoy the saint anymore and turned others away from annoying him also. When Leo V, the Armenian, met with a wicked death, the empire was taken over by the Orthodox Emperor Michael, the Stammerer, who liberated all the Orthodox sufferers. Nicetas then withdrew to an isolated place near Constantinople, where in prayer and thanksgiving to God for all, spent the remaining days of his earthly life. During his lifetime he worked many miracles through prayer. When he died his body was translated to his monastery. At the time of the funeral procession, many who were ill and who reached out and touched his body were healed. His relics were placed next to the grave of Nicephorus his spiritual father and Athanasius, his companion. This great hierarch died in the year 824 A.D.

2. SAINT PAUL, THE SORROWFUL ONE

Paul was a Russian by birth. In his youth he was enslaved by the Turks. Not wanting to deny the Faith of Christ and to embrace Islam, he was tortured and slain by the sword in Constantinople in the year 1683 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR ULPHIANUS

Ulphianus was a young man from the city of Tyre. He suffered for Christ at the hands of Urban, the mayor of the city of Tyre, who also was the torturer of Amphianus [April 2]. Finally, he was tied in a sack along with a dog and a snake and tossed into the sea. He suffered and was glorified in the year 306 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

SAINT NICETAS THE CONFESSOR

"I the wounds of Christ on my body bear." (*)
"And only in the Cross of the Lord I boast." (**)
Thus, said Paul the chosen apostle,
After him follow a company of those who have already repented,
A company of repented ones, who received the wounds
And in much sufferings they spent days,
For the sake of the Living Christ, Savior and Lord,
As did Saint Paul, the Apostle of the People.
And Nicetas the wonderful, bore the heavy cross,
Suffering and scorn for Christ, he endured.
A fragile body, but a spirit as of steel
In Nicetas the holy, martyr courageous.
The Emperor he conquered and Empires he outlived,
Therefore at him, the earth and the heavens are amazed.
Now, among the angels wedded in glory
He helps all who, for the Cross, are persecuted.
Before God, his prayer ascends,
And on earth, his help descends.

(*) Galatians 6:17

(**) Galatians 6:14

REFLECTION

"I await a thousand deaths for myself," wrote St. Athanasius the Great to his flock in Egypt at the time of the terrible Arian heresy. Every religious man can say this about himself who, in the spirit, has glanced and seen the net in which is contained every human soul in this world. The more spiritual a man is, the denser the net becomes. Such is the will of God: that the most spiritual are saved by the most narrow path. The Psalmist David also says: **"Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19)**. However, in the end, victory and glory belong to the righteous. They need only to arm themselves with faith and forbearance. Whoever believes also understands their suffering. He who clothes himself with patience, will see victory and glory. To him who loves the Lord, even the narrowest path is sufficiently wide enough, the greatest pain an easy yoke and the most violent death, a joyful wedding feast.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus in Hades:

1. How He descended into Hades with great power, by which Hades trembles;
2. How the evil spirits, the then lords of Hades, flee before His Face;
3. How the souls of the righteous ancestors and prophets overwhelmingly rejoice at His coming.

HOMILY

-About the great desire of God-

"Who wills everyone to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4).

God wants that all men be saved, that is why He descended into Hades to save those who lived on earth before His coming. For, had He not descended into Hades, an enormous number of righteous souls would have perished forever. And yet, had He not descended into Hades, the main habitat of evil against God and the human race, Hades would have remained undestroyed. Therefore, the two reasons which motivated Christ, the Giver-of-Life, to descend into Hades in the Spirit are: **First**, to destroy the nest of the powers of Hades and, **Second**, to bring from Hades to Heaven, the souls of ancestors, prophets and righteous men and women, who have fulfilled the Old Dispensation (The Old Law of God) and, by that, pleased God. Before Satan was totally jubilant at gazing upon Christ humiliated and lifeless on the Cross, Christ appeared alive and almighty in the midst of Hades, the primary abode of Satan. What unexpected and dreadful news for Satan! For three years Satan wove snares against Christ on earth and in three days, behold, Christ destroyed Satan's kingdom and carried away the most precious booty in the form of a swarm of righteous souls.

O Lord, You want that all men be saved. We pray to You, save even us. For there is no salvation nor Savior outside of You. In You do we hope, You alone do we worship, You, the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE JOSEPH THE HYMNOGRAPHER

Joseph was born in Sicily of pious and virtuous parents, Plotinus and Agatha. After the death of his parents, Joseph moved to Thessalonica where he was tonsured a monk. As a monk, he was a model to all in fasting, extreme restraint, ceaseless prayer, chanting of the Psalms, vigils and labor. The bishop of Thessalonica ordained him a priest [Heiromonk]. While visiting Thessalonica the distinguished Gregory Decapolis was so impressed with Joseph, because of his rare character, that he invited him to his monastery in Constantinople. When the flame of the Iconoclastic heresy erupted again under Leo V, the Armenian, Joseph was sent to Rome to call upon the Pope and the Roman Church to battle for Orthodoxy. While enroute, Joseph was captured by pirates and taken to Crete where the heretics detained him in prison for six years. Joseph rejoiced that he was made worthy to suffer for Christ and, for that, he continually praised God, considering the iron chains on him as an adornment of gold. Early in the morning on Christmas day, in the sixth year of Joseph's imprisonment, the wicked Emperor Leo was slain in church while attending Matins. At that same moment, St. Nicholas appeared to Joseph in prison and said to him: "Arise and follow me!" Joseph felt himself being elevated in the air and, all at once, found himself before the gates of Constantinople. All true believers rejoiced at his coming. He composed canons and hymns for many saints. He possessed the "gift of discernment" for which Patriarch Photius appointed him the spiritual father and confessor for priests recommending him as, "A man of God, an angel in the flesh and father of fathers." In extreme old age, Joseph gave up his soul to the Lord Whom he faithfully served both in words and in hymns. He died peacefully on the eve of Holy and Great Thursday in the year 883 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR PHERBUTHA, HER WIDOWED SISTER AND THEIR SLAVE

During the reign of the Persian Emperor Saborius, St. Simeon, the bishop, was slain. At the wish of the empress, Pherbutha, the sister of Bishop Simeon, was taken to the palace. Pherbutha was exceptionally beautiful and because of that many suitors thronged to her among whom were many pagan priests and soothsayers. Pherbutha rejected them all and provoked much anger against herself. At that time, the empress became ill and all the pagan priests explained to the emperor that the empress was poisoned by Pherbutha and, as a cure for the ailing empress, they recommended the following: that Pherbutha, her sister and their slave, as Christians, be sawn and that three parts of their bodies be placed on one side and three parts on the other side and that the empress should be borne between them. The emperor agreed to the recommendation of these blood-thirsty pagan priests. Pherbutha, together with her sister and their slave, suffered for Christ in the year 343 A.D., thereby earning the incorruptible wreath in the eternal kingdom of their Lord.

3. THE VENERABLE ZOSIMUS

Zosimus was a monk of the Jordanian monastic community during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Younger. It was he who discovered, administered Holy Communion to and buried the body of St. Mary the Egyptian. He died in the Lord in his hundredth year in the sixth century.

4. THE VENERABLE MARTYR NICETAS

Nicetas was a Slav from Albania. As a monk of the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos), he went to Serres where he debated with the Mullahs about religion. Being that they could not overcome him with reason, the Turks subjected him to torture under which Nicetas, the holy one, died and gave up his soul to his God in the year 1808 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR PHERBUTHA

The handmaiden of the Lord, the virgin Pherbutha,
As an innocent lamb, to the slaughter, remained silent,
Neither says she: Woe! Nor says, woe is me!
But with joy received and endured the suffering.
She despised earthly illusions and falsehoods,
For to her, the Lord was more dear than the whole world,
In the royal court: sickness and emptiness
Without wondrous faith in the Son of God;
Among the soothsayers; the cursed darkness
Without the knowledge of the Creator and the heavenly world.
The beauty of the flesh - a stumbling block,
Without God's love, faith and hoping
Therefore, Pherbutha totally sacrificed herself for Christ,
To the world she surrendered all, except her pure soul.
Her bodily cage, the tormentor crushed
But the living soul, he cannot enslave;
The cage [her body] was cut up; the soul to Paradise flees,
Into true freedom from false freedom.
The blood splattered upon the earth, and the body became earth,
And, in eternity, Pherbutha remained alive.

REFLECTION

He who glorifies God, God also glorifies him. This was clearly and abundantly shown in the lives of the saints. St. Joseph the Hymnographer, indeed, glorified God in works, in sufferings and in hymns. God glorified him both in this life and after death. During his life, the Holy Father Nicholas appeared to him in prison and freed him. When St. Joseph wondered whether he should compose a Canon to the Apostle Bartholomew, this apostle appeared to him in radiant vestments and said to Joseph that it is well-pleasing to God that he compose this Canon. When St. Joseph died, a citizen of Constantinople learned of the glory by which God glorified His chosen one. This man had come into the church of St. Theodore Phanariot to beseech the saint to reveal to him where one of his escaped servants had hidden. Because St. Theodore was known among the people as a saint who reveals where something is that had been lost or stolen, he was called Phanariot, which means **The Revealer**. For three days and three nights, this man prayed and when he received no response from the saint, wanted to leave. At that moment, St. Theodore appeared to him in a vision saying: "Why do you become angry O man? Joseph the Hymnographer's soul was being separated from his body and we were with him. When he died this night, all of us whom he glorified in hymns, translated his soul to the heavens and placed it before the Face of God. That is why I was tardy in not appearing to you."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus:

1. How His soul returned again from Hades into His body;
2. How He, through His Divine Power, by which He resurrected other dead bodies, resurrected His own body.

HOMILY

-About the Church as the Body of the Lord-

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (St. John 2:19).

Thus spoke the Lord to the wicked Jews about **"the Temple of His body" (St. John 2:21)**. But since it was not given to the wicked to understand anything, so also the Jews did not understand and mocked Him. The Lord did not rebuke them for that but that which He spoke, occurred. The Jews destroyed His body but He restored it again and raised it in glory and power. The wicked punished God with destruction but God reprimanded the wicked by restoration. It is satisfying to the wicked ones to be able to show their power by killing but, to God, there was joy to show His power by giving life. There is nothing as short-lived as the triumph of evil nor nothing as lasting as the triumph of truth.

"Destroy this temple." The Lord referred to His body as the Church. Destroyed, that Church was crowded into a dark tomb and by means of a heavy stone prevented light from having access to it. But, that Church was not in need of the light of the sun. It had its own light, its own Sun of Righteousness, Who shone from within. The tender Heavenly Hand removed the stone from the tomb and the Lord resurrected in glory and in power. That which once occurred to the All-Pure Body of Christ, occurred many times later to the Church of the holy ones on earth. The enemies of the Church cruelly persecuted and tormented it, demolished it and buried it in darkness. But, the Church after such bruises and confinement, resurrected again with greater glory and power. Just as the Church of His Body resurrected, so it will at the end of time, the Church of His holy ones will resurrect in fullness and perfection.

O resurrected Lord, do not give us over to decay and eternal death, but resurrect us to life eternal.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS AGATHOPODUS AND THEODULUS

Agathopodus was a deacon and Theodulus was a lector in the church at Thessalonica. Agathopodus was adorned with the greying of age and Theodulus with youthful understanding and chastity. At the time of Diocletian's pursuit of Christians these two were summoned to court. They responded with rejoicing and holding each other by the hand, they walked along crying out: "We are Christians!" All the advice of the judges that they deny Christ and worship idols, remained in vain. After an extended imprisonment and hunger they were sentenced to death by drowning in the sea. Their hands were bound behind their backs, a heavy stone was hung around their necks and they were led out to be drowned. When they first wanted to toss Agathopodus into the deep, he cried out: "Behold, by this second baptism we are washed of all our sins and in purity do we depart to Christ Jesus." Shortly afterward, the sea tossed their drowned bodies upon the shore and Christians buried their bodies with honors. St. Theodulus appeared to his acquaintances as a bright angel in glistening attire and ordered them to distribute all of his remaining estate to the poor. These glorious and wonderful soldiers of Christ suffered honorably during the reign of Diocletian and the Thessalonican Prince Faustinus in the year 303 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE MARK OF TRACHE

He is also called "Mark the Athenian" because Athens was the place of his birth. His parents died after he completed his higher education in Athens. He thought to himself that death, even for himself, was unavoidable and that one should sufficiently prepare beforehand for that honorable departure from this world. Distributing all of his possessions to the poor, he sat on a plank in the sea and with a tenacious faith in God's help, prayed that God direct him wherever He wills. God, in His Providence, protected him and brought him to Lybia (or Ethiopia) to a mountain called Trache. Mark lived an ascetical life on this mountain for ninety-five years, seeing neither man nor beast. For thirty years, he waged a violent combat with evil spirits and suffered from hunger, thirst, frost and heat. He ate dirt and drank sea water. After thirty years of the most vehement suffering, the defeated demons fled from him and an angel of God began to bring him food daily in the form of bread, fish and fruit. St. Serapion visited him before his death and, afterward, made known the miraculous life of Mark. Mark asked St. Serapion: "Are there any Christians in the world now, who, if they were to say to this mountain, 'Arise from here and hurl yourself into the sea,' would it be so?" At that moment, the mountain upon which they stood moved in the direction of the sea. Mark raised his hand and stopped it. Such was the miracle-working power which this man of God possessed. Before his death, he prayed for the salvation of mankind and then gave up his soul to God. St. Serapion saw angels as they bore Mark's soul and he also saw an extended hand from heaven which received it. St. Mark lived to be one-hundred thirty years old and died about the year 400 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE PRAYER OF SAINT MARK OF TRACHE

Behold the final hour on earth for me ticks,
I go where the Lord shines in place of the sun,
From the dusty, fleshly garment, I am leaving,
And before Your face O Christ, I am departing.
Just one more wish over the earth, I am unfolding
Before Your Throne, with prayer I penetrate:
For all mankind, I desire salvation,
For everyone and for all, freedom from sin.
I desire that the virtuous ascetics be saved,
And all diligent laborers in Your field.
I desire that prisoners [for the Faith] because of You, be saved,
For the sake of Your love, who sacrifice themselves,
And for sinners cruel, that, violence commit
And those who endure violence for Your sake,
Salvation to the monasteries [Lavras] with monks plentiful,
Salvation to the faithful; the tearful and the poor,
Salvation to the churches throughout the whole universe,
The Shepherds of the Church, to all as to me,
All the servants of God and handmaidens all,
Whom the world knows or whom in loneliness hide:
Salvation to the baptized ones and the adopted ones,
With the Life-giving Spirit of God enlivened:
Salvation to the humble and the merciful,
Faithful emperors and princes faithful
To every heart of man, the healthy and the infirm,
And salvation to my brother Serapion.
O Powerful Lord, that is my wish
And final prayer. Let it be Your will!

REFLECTION

"Live as though you were not of this world and you will have peace." Thus spoke St. Anthony to his disciples. An amazing lesson but truthful. We bring about greater misfortunes and uneasiness upon ourselves when we desire to associate and identify ourselves, as much as possible, to remain in this world. Whenever a person retreats, as much as possible, from this world and as often as he contemplates this world as existing without him and the deeper he immerses himself in reflecting about his unworthiness in this world, he will stand closer to God and will have deeper spiritual peace. **"Everyday I face death"**, says St. Paul (**1 Corinthians 15:31**), that is, everyday I feel that I am not in this world. That is why he daily felt like a heavenly citizen in the spirit. When the torturer Faustinus asked St. Theodulus: "Is not life better than a violent death?" St. Theodulus replied: "Indeed, even I think that life is better than death. Because of this, I decided to abhor this mortal and temporal life, barely existing on earth, so that I may be a partaker of life eternal."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus:

1. How the earth did quake at His return to the body as it did before His separation from the body;
2. How the angels descended into the tomb to serve Him as they had always served Him when He allowed them to do so.

HOMILY

-About the fulfillment of the prophecy-

"Because You will not abandon My Soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful One to undergo corruption" (Psalm 16:10).

These are the words, the glowing prophetic words of the inspired discernor of mystery. This, David speaks about Christ the Lord, about His soul and about His body, i.e. about that which is human in Him. That these words of David pertain to the resurrected Christ was witnessed by the Apostle Peter in his first sermon immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit: **"Because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption" (Acts of the Apostles 2:27)**. For the apostle says, **"about the patriarch David that he died and was buried and his tomb is in our midst to this day" (Acts of the Apostles 2:29)**. It is not possible that those words refer to David, although David speaks as though they are from him and refer to him, but rather those words refer to a descendant of David according to the flesh. The body of David is decomposed as are the bodies of his other descendants. Christ, therefore, is David's descendant in the flesh, Who, neither remained in Hades nor did His body see corruption. **"He [David] foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah" (Acts of the Apostles 2:31)**. Truly, a glowing prophecy! Truly, a wondrous foresight! Before the resurrection of the Lord, these words must have sounded unintelligible and irrational for all the Jewish interpreters of the Psalms! When the seal on the tomb is removed, then the seal of the many, totally obscure and unclear prophecies, is also removed. Christ resurrects and the mysteries become known. The seal of the tomb is removed not only from His body but also from the countless words and visions of the prophets. Christ resurrects and the prophetic words are also resurrected. Descending into Hades the Lord brought the heavenly light to the souls of the righteous fathers and prophets. By His resurrection, He brought their words and visions to the light of understanding and truth. Christ resurrects and all that is good, righteous and truthful, before and after the resurrection morning, resurrected also.

O, resurrected Lord, place us among the resurrected citizens of Your eternal kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT EUTYCHIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Euthychius was born in Phrygia of pious and devout parents. His father was an officer. Once, as a child, when Eutychius was playing with his playmates, their game was that each of them would write their names on a wall and, beside their name, they would guess what rank each of them would attain in life. When it was Eutychius' turn he wrote: **Eutychius--Patriarch!** In his thirtieth year he became abbot of the monastery in Amasea. At age forty, he was sent by the Metropolitan of Amasea to represent him at the Fifth Ecumenical Council [Constantinople, 553 A.D.]. At the Council, he glowed like a shining star among the Fathers of the Church both in learning as well as in his zealousness. When the debate began whether heretics could be anathematized after their deaths, he supported the opinion that they could be by calling upon the **Third Book of Kings** (in some translations, called **The First Book of Kings 13: 1-8** and the **Fourth Book of Kings** (in some translations, called **The Second Book of Kings 23:16**). Eutychius endeared himself greatly to Emperor Justinian and Patriarch Mennas. The emperor sought his advice on many occasions and Patriarch Mennas designated Eutychius as his successor and implored the emperor to carry this out in deed. And so it happened! St. Eutychius governed the Church in peace for twelve years. Then the devil raised up a tempest against him. This tempest reached Justinian himself. The emperor became deluded and succumbed to the Monophysite heresy (**Aphtartodocetea**) which falsely taught that the Lord Jesus, before His resurrection, had a divine and incorruptible body, without feeling, hunger, thirst or pain. Eutychius adamantly stood up against this heresy, for which the emperor banished him into exile to his original monastery. Eutychius remained there for twelve years and eight months and proved himself to be a great miracle-worker healing people of various illnesses through prayer and by anointing them with holy oil. Justinian repented and died. He was succeeded by Justin, who then restored Eutychius to the patriarchal throne where this saint remained, governing the Church of God in peace, until his death. In 582 A.D., in his seventieth year, he took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the Lord, Whom he faithfully and courageously served throughout his entire life.

2. THE HOLY ONE-HUNDRED TWENTY MARTYRS, WHO SUFFERED IN PERSIA

When the Persian Emperor Sapor plundered the lands of Byzantium, he enslaved one-hundred twenty Christians. Since his attempts to persuade them to deny Christ and worship fire proved to be in vain, the emperor tossed them into the fire and burned them alive. Among those martyrs, were nine virgins dedicated to God. They all suffered honorably between the years 344 A.D. and 347 A.D. and took up habitation in the mansions of Christ the King.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EUTHYCHIUS

Euthychius witnessed Christ to the Emperor:
Christ, said he, a weakened body He had,
A body susceptible to hunger and pain,
Similar to, but not the same with the body on the Throne.
A ray of the servant on earth, the King of Glory carried
But the glorified body, into heaven He ascended.
Where would the tears be in the illusionary body?
Where the bloody sweat O Emperor, on the illusionary brow?
"I am hungry!" "I am thirsty!" spoke the Truth [Christ],
Why do you drive the Son of God into a lie?
When His hunger He witnesses to the world
And you to Him: you are satiated! You speak to His face!
When thirsty, He cries out while on the Cross hangs,
And, to Him you respond: Thirsty You are not, You are not!
O Great Emperor, impurity do not speak,
Behind your words, the demon himself hides.
In vain do you build churches, when you destroy the Faith,
And in vain the votive offerings, when its flames you extinguish.
Christ's sufferings, of all other sufferings are greater,
The whole of history, revolves around the Cross.
For that, the Cross is honorable, capable of healing and awesome,
Because [the Cross of Christ] it is the source of pain -
It is brimming over and abundant.
On the Cross is Christ; man nailed,
Blood, sweat and moaning - and not a dream that is dreamed.

REFLECTION

It is said about an ancient orator that he labored day and night to perfect himself in the art of oratory. Someone said to him: "Demosthenes does not want you to be the chief orator." To which he immediately retorted: "Neither will I allow him to be the only one." If you cannot be a first-class saint like St. Anthony, do not lower your hands and do not say: "Nothing can come of me!" Increase your effort and double your talent. **"In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places"** said the Lord (**St. John 14:2**). If you merit to settle in the least of these dwelling places, you will be more glorious and more fortunate than all of the rulers who have ever existed on earth. Everyone, according to his own talent. Neither will you be a St. Anthony nor will St. Anthony, alone, occupy the Kingdom of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus:

1. How the stone on the tomb did not split, neither was the seal on it broken;
2. How the All-powerful and meek Lord did not damage the tomb during His resurrection, as the Virgin's womb was not damaged at the time of His birth.

HOMILY

-About the victory over the last enemy-

"The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Man's **first** enemy is the devil, the **second** is sin and the **third** is death. The Lord Jesus conquered all three of these enemies of the human race. **By His humility**, He conquered the proud devil. **By His death**, He conquered sin and **by His resurrection**, He conquered death. In conquering all of our enemies, He invites us to be partakers in His glorious victory. Not only that we conquer but that we attach ourselves next to the Victor. Only His power conquers, only His weapons mow down. We are without power and weapons but our enemies are fearful. With Him and along side Him, we are conquering those mightier than ourselves. What is the price that He offers to us for His victory? A meager price, my brethren; for a very paltry price He offers us the most precious victory. To humble ourselves and to submit ourselves to the will of God, that is the price He seeks in order to conquer the devil for us. To die unto ourselves, to die to fleshly desires and passions, that is the price which He seeks in order to conquer for us. To live for Him and not for ourselves, to receive Him into our hearts, that is the price He seeks in order to conquer death for us. He conquered all enemies openly and completely. This is the price for which He offers His victory to each of us. The Apostle Paul speaks: **"But thanks be to God Who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).**

O resurrected Lord, enlighten, strengthen and heal us by Your victory.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT GEORGE THE CONFESSOR

Because of his great virtues, which he attained through a long and difficult orification, George was chosen and invested as Metropolitan of Mitylene. This saint governed his spiritual flock prudently and zealously to a ripe old age. When a persecution began under Leo V, the Armenian, who, in destroying holy icons, summoned this saintly elder to Constantinople to an assembly of bishops convened by him and, whose intention it was to discontinue the veneration of icons, George not only refused to carry out the wish of the wicked emperor but with other courageous bishops stood up in defense of holy icons. Not only was he ridiculed for that but he was also banished into exile by the emperor to the region of Cherson. Here he endured all sorts of physical afflictions and deprivations for the remaining years of his life. He died and was translated to eternal life about the year 816 A.D. Because of his great sanctity and love for the Lord Jesus, George was a great miracle-worker, both during his life and after his death.

2. THE VENERABLE NIL SORSKY

Nil is one of the great Fathers of the Russian Church. He was the founder of the Scete way of monastic life in Russia. He died peacefully in the year 1508 A.D. His relics repose in the Sorsky Monastery. His "Rule of Life" for the "Scete" way of monastic living represents a first-class work on the spiritual and practical life of a monk.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR CALLIOPIUS

Calliopius was an only son granted by God to a senator from Perga in Pamphylia after the senator had shed many tears in prayer. From his early youth his devout mother, Theoclea, taught him to respect God and to live a chaste life. Calliopius was still a youngster when a terrible persecution began during the reign of Emperor Maximian. To spare him from death, his mother placed him in a boat, gave him an ample amount of money and saw him off to the city of Pompeiopolis. However, God in His Divine Providence, planned it otherwise. Landing in Pompeiopolis he fell into the midst of a tumultuous polytheistic celebration. When Calliopius refused to participate in this ridiculous feast, at the insistence of the crazed mob, he was pushed toward Maximus the commander, before whom Calliopius confessed that he was a Christian. The commander ordered that Calliopius be beaten with lead canes and burned by fire. Wounded throughout, they cast him into prison. Learning about the tortures of her son, Theoclea distributed her entire estate to the poor and needy and with a paltry sum of money hurried to her son in prison. Upon entering the prison, Theoclea bowed down before her son and dressed his wounds. Finally, the commander pronounced the ultimate sentence. Calliopius was to be crucified on a cross. Joy and pain intermingled in the heart of his mother. When they brought her son to the place of execution, she slipped five pieces of gold to the executioners to have her son crucified, not as the Lord was, but rather upside down. Theoclea did this out of humility before the Lord. Calliopius was crucified upside down on Holy Thursday. His mother stood beneath the cross-giving praise to God. One the second day when they removed his lifeless body from the cross, she fell upon her son and she, herself, died. Thus, these two went before the Throne of the King of Glory together. They honorably suffered in the year 304 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE DANIEL OF PEREYASLAVL

Daniel had, as a unique form of mortification, that of caring for the dead. Whenever he heard that someone was found frozen to death or that had died in some other manner, Daniel would hasten to bury him decently and to offer prayers to God for him. He died peacefully in the year 1540 A.D. His relics remain intact.

5. THE VENERABLE GREGORY SINAITES

A great saint and ascetic of Mt. Sinai and Mt. Athos [August 8].

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR CALLIOPIUS

Calliopius, Calliopius,
Depart there! Where there is no death!
His mother speaks to him and bids him her last farewell,
About the fate of her only son, she dreams.
Calliopius, the youth most handsome
To the commander, his faith he explained:
Christ is my life, the way, the truth,
Christ is my desire: my only desire!
To crucifixion, Calliopius, they lead,
Behind him, throngs of people walk.
He, pale and peaceful, rigidly bound,
Walking quietly, bitterly tortured,
His mother to him whispers: Calliopius!
I am traveling O mother where there is no death!
Martyr of Christ, martyr glorious,
The Cross received, heavy and head first.
Over the dead body, the mother is bending:
With tears, Calliopius she bathes
And whispering quietly: Calliopius!
Here I am mother, where there is no death!

REFLECTION

"Spiritual directors should distinguish themselves from their subordinates as much as a shepherd distinguishes himself from his sheep." Thus speaks St. Isidorus of Pelusium in interpreting the First Epistle of St. Timothy. The life of a priest always serves as an example, be it good or be it bad. By an exemplary life, a priest confirms the Gospel and, by a wicked life, he denies the Gospel. No one in this world is in such a position to confirm the truth of the Gospel or to deny it in such a manner by his life, as is a priest. A good priest is distinguished from a wicked priest by his works no less than a shepherd is distinguished from a wolf. That is why a goodly portion of good priests will be with the sons of God and a goodly portion of wicked priests will be with the wild beasts of darkness. The good shepherds of the Church, even in the last moments of their lives, were concerned about their flocks which they were leaving behind. Upon his death bed, St. Joseph the Hymnographer prayed to God: "Preserve your flock, O Son of God, created by Your right hand and protect them to the end of time. Be of assistance to the beloved sons of Your Church. Grant to Your Bride [Holy Church] eternal peace and a stormless calm." St. Antipas, burning in a blazing ox, cast out of copper, prayed to God in this manner: "Not only me, but those also who would come after me, make them partakers of Your mercy."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus:

1. How the myrrh-bearing women approached the tomb to anoint Him with myrrh and aloes. To anoint the One Who is the sweet-smelling savor of heaven and earth;
2. How the angel announces the resurrection of our Lord to them with the words: **"Why do you seek the living One among the dead?" (St. Luke 24:5).**

HOMILY

-About seeking the living among the dead-

"Why do you seek the living One among the dead?" (St. Luke 24:5).

The angel of God asks the Myrrh-bearing women as though in astonishment: **"Why do you seek the living One among the dead?"** As though the perceiver of the mystery of God and God's power wanted to say: "How could you have thought for a moment that He is the hostage of death? Do you not know that He is the principal source of life? Do you not know that all life is through Him and that not one living thing can borrow not even a drop of life from any other source? Did He not fully reveal to you His authority over life and death on earth? Who gave life to the lifeless Lazarus? Who took away the life of the barren fig tree?"

O my brethren, let us also cease to look for the living among the dead. If there are some of us who are still seeking Christ among the dead, let them desist from this soul-destroying effort. This is the vain effort of the Jews, pagans and non-Christians. We know that the Lord and Giver of life is not in the tomb but on the Throne of Glory in the heavens. The spirit, not darkened by sin, looks up into heaven and does not see the tomb; and the spirit, darkened by sin, looks into the tomb and does not see heaven. Sin and virtue govern the spiritual vision of man and reveals to each man its own world at cross purposes with one another. Sin overthrows the vision of the spirit to the earth and reveals to it the corruption of the world. Virtue uplifts the spirit to heaven and reveals to it the eternal world and the resurrected Christ as the King in that world.

O my brethren, let us not seek life among creation, but from the Creator. Let us not commit an even graver sin i.e., let us not seek the Creator in the tomb of creation nor the Illuminating, Immortal One in the darkness of death.

O Lord Jesus, Victor over death, we cry out to You: resurrect us also into life eternal from the corruption and darkness of death.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 8 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES HERODIAN, AGABUS, RUFUS, ASYNCRITUS, PHLEGON AND HERMES

They were all numbered among the Seventy [Lesser] Apostles. All were mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his epistles. Herodian was a kinsman of Paul. "Greet," writes St. Paul to the Romans, **"my relative Herodian" (Romans 16:11)**. As the Bishop of Neo-Parthia, Herodian suffered much at the hands of the Jews. They beat him over the head with rods, they struck him on the mouth with stones and stabbed him with knives. After they left him for dead, St. Herodian arose and continued to serve the apostles. He assisted the Apostle Peter in Rome and was beheaded along with many other Christians the same day that St. Peter was crucified.

St. Agabus possessed a prophetic spirit. Two of his prophecies are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. **First**, he prophesied a great famine throughout the world which came true during the reign of Caesar Claudius: **"And one of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine all over the world and it happened under Claudius" (Acts of the Apostles 11:28)**. **Second**, when he met with the Apostle Paul in Caesarea, who was enroute to Jerusalem, Agabus took Paul's belt and bound his own hands and feet saying: **"Thus says the Holy Spirit: This is the way the Jews will bind the owner of this belt in Jerusalem, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles" (Acts of the Apostles 21:11)**.

St. Rufus was a Bishop of Thebes in Greece. St. Paul also mentions him. **"Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord" (Romans 16:13)**.

St. Asyncritus was Bishop of Hyrcania in Asia and is mentioned along with the others in **Romans 16:14**.

St. Phlegon is also mentioned in the same epistle. **"Greet ASYNCRITUS, PHLEGON, HERMES, PATROBAS and HERMAS and the brothers who are with them" (Romans 16:14)**. He was a bishop in the Thracian city of Marathon.

St. Hermas, mentioned with the others, was a bishop in Dalmatia.

All of them, like bees for Christ, spread the honey of the Gospel into the various regions, suffering much for the love of Christ. All were translated into the eternal kingdom of Christ the beloved.

2. SAINT NIPHON, BISHOP OF NOVGOROD

Niphon was distinguished by his great enthusiasm in constructing and restoring the churches of God and by showing great courage in opposing the stances of the tyrannical princes. Thirteen days before his death, St. Theodosius appeared to Niphon and announced his imminent passing over to the other world. He died in the year 1156 A.D.

3. SAINT CELESTINE, POPE OF ROME

A great champion of the Orthodox Faith. At the time of the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431 A.D.), Celestine wrote an epistle against Nestorius, the heretic. He died peacefully in the year 432 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLES

Holy apostles, chosen ones of God,
You ran the race and reached the goal.
The vanity of the world, they despised; to God, they reached out,
The worldly they sacrificed, the eternal, they acquired.
Their love for Christ, stronger than all other powers,
To them, it shone through the darkness of paganism.
The race is over, the battle obtained,
The army of heroes brought to Christ.
In Christ there are many victorious wreaths,
Even if you want, you could be wedded.
Apostles holy, pray to God,
That He deprive us not of the Kingdom of Heaven.

REFLECTION

There is heroism above heroism and asceticism above asceticism. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus invited Hilarion the Great to dinner and in order to show the greatest hospitality to his distinguished guest, placed fried chicken on the table and offered it to him. Hilarion said to him: "Forgive me, but ever since I was tonsured a monk, I have eaten nothing butchered." To that Epiphanius replied: "And I, ever since I was tonsured a monk, have never lay down in bed until I first forgave my enemy." Amazed, Hilarion said: "Your virtue is greater than mine, Oh holy master!" This is a great lesson for all of us. Fasting is an admirable thing but it is more admirable to forgive insults. Through fasting, man is preparing for charity but, by forgiving insults, man shows charity. Fasting precedes forgiveness but fasting alone, does not save without forgiveness.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. In the earthly body before the resurrection; in the body susceptible to hunger, pain and death;
2. In the Heavenly Body after the resurrection; in the body not susceptible to hunger, pain and death.

HOMILY

-About the resurrection of the dead-

**"But someone may say, 'How are the dead raised?'
With what kind of body will they come back?'
(1 Corinthians 15:35).**

The Apostle Paul knows in advance the objections which the unbelievers will make concerning the resurrection from the dead and, in advance, he rejects them. Even today, the non-believers who have not seen with the physical eyes the miracle of the resurrection in nature, much less the spiritual resurrection, ask: **"How will the dead be raised?"** **"You fool!"** continues the apostle, **"What you sow is not brought to life unless it dies" (1 Corinthians 15:36).** Until the seed dies in the ground, the plant will not grow, in other words, something totally different than the seed will sprout up. The non-believers see through their eyes and do not see, but further ask: "How will a dead man resurrect?" How? In the same way that Christ resurrected. He lowered Himself lifeless in the tomb and rose alive. Even nature manifests the resurrection from the dead; but stronger than nature, it is manifested by the resurrected Lord. In order to make it easier for us to believe and to hope - to believe in the resurrection in general and to have hope in our own resurrection, He Himself, resurrected from the grave and prior to that resurrecting Lazarus who lay in the grave for four days, the son of the widow of Nain and the daughter of Jarius.

The non-believers ask: "With what kind of body will the dead rise?" In that kind of body which God wills. With God there are many kinds of bodies. The Apostle Paul divides all bodies into two groups: into earthly bodies and into heavenly bodies. Therefore, they who have died in earthly bodies will be clothed with heavenly bodies: the incorruptible will replace the corruptible, the immortal will replace the mortal, the beautiful will replace the ugly. In this heavenly body man will also recognize himself and others around him as man recognizes himself or even when he is clothed in beggar's rags or even when he is clothed in royal purple.

Lord, All-plentiful, do not hand us over to eternal corruption but, as royal sons, clothe us in the garment of immortality.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR EUPSYCHIOUS

Eupsyichius was of noble birth and was well instructed in pious beliefs. During the reign of Julian the Apostate and when St. Basil the Great governed the Church of God in Caesarea, Eupsyichius entered into marriage with a prominent maiden. However, it was not given to him to live even one day in marriage. For at the time of his wedding, it so happened that there was a pagan feast with sacrificial offerings to the idol Fortune. Eupsyichius, with his companions, entered the temple and smashed all the idols and even demolished the temple itself. Hearing of this, Julian became greatly enraged and ordered the culprits beheaded; that many Christians be inducted into the army; that an enormous tribute be imposed upon all Christians; that, at the expense of the Christians, the temple of Fortune be rebuilt again and, that the city be deprived of its honorary name 'Caesarea' given it by Caesar Claudius and to be called by its former name, Maza. At first, Eupsyichius was tied to a tree, brutally tortured and later was beheaded in the year 362 A.D. Shortly after that, the wicked Emperor Julian visited this city (Maza) on his way to Persia against whom he was waging war. St. Basil the Great went out to meet him and carried three loaves of barley bread as a sign of respect and hospitality. The emperor ordered that a handful of hay be given to the saint as a reciprocal gift. St. Basil said to the emperor: "You make jest of us O Emperor. We offer you bread by which we feed ourselves and you, in turn, give us food for livestock which you, by your authority cannot change into food for men." To that the emperor replied: "Know that I will feed you this hay when I return from Persia." However, the wicked apostate did not return from Persia, for he died a deserving and unnatural death.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYR VADIM

During the reign of the Persian Emperor Sapor, Vadim, the abbot of a certain monastery and a man famous for his generosity was cast into prison with seven of his disciples. With them in prison was a certain Prince Nirsan who was also a Christian. Everyday they were taken out and beaten. Prince Nirsan became terrified and promised to deny the Faith and worship the sun. This was gratifying to Sapor and he promised to give Nirsan, among other things, the entire estate of Vadim's monastery if he would behead Vadim by his own hand. Nirsan agrees to this. With a quivering hand and frightened by the majestic countenance of St. Vadim, he struck this holy man with the sword many times on the neck until he finally beheaded him. Shortly after that, Nirsan succumbed to despair and stabbed himself with the sword and received at his own hand, the due punishment for the murder of the righteous one. St. Vadim suffered in the year 376 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE MARTYR VADIM

The courageous Vadim, looks death in the eyes
And feels sorry for Nirsan because misery befell him.
Nirsan, with a bare sword before Vadim stands,
Of God he is not afraid, but is afraid of the saint.
Brandishing the sword and, brandishing, lowers it!
Before the knight of God; in truth, a sheer coward!
Nirsan, Nirsan! Vadim, to him, speaks:
On the road to eternity, Vadim to you, speaks:
You denied Christ; falsehood, you embraced,
By yourself alone, your soul you lost [destroyed].
Death, I eagerly await every godly-hour,
That the gate of the eternal kingdom, He opens to me.
But, from your hand, I was sorry to die,
And, never more, to see you O prince.
Any traitor of Christ, eternal darkness will cover
And, twice as black - one who slays Christians.
That, the saint uttered and with silence became silent,
And Nirsan slew him with a quivering hand.
Such a lion died from a frightened rabbit!
But, who did Nirsan slay? Himself or the saint?
Eternal justice speaks: the thief judges himself,
And to the saint of God, no harm came to him.

REFLECTION

It is said about Pericles that he was a man of almost perfect human beauty but that his head was oblong and resembled a squash, so that he incurred being ridiculed when he appeared bareheaded in public. In order to conceal the defect of this great man of his people, Greek sculptors always portrayed him with a helmet on his head. When some, among the pagans, knew how to conceal the defects of their friends, how much more, therefore, are we as Christians obligated to do the same? **"Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10)**, commands the apostle to those who cling to Christ. How can we say that we adhere to the meek and All-pure Christ, if we daily poison the air with tales about the sins and shortcomings of others? To conceal your own virtue and the shortcomings of others, this is the preeminent spiritual wisdom.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He appears to Mary Magdalene in the Garden and at first glance, Mary does not recognize Him;
2. How He tenderheartedly addresses Mary and Mary recognizes Him, rejoices in Him and she imparts her joy to the disciples.

HOMILY

-About the need for death in order to bring forth much fruit-

"Amen, Amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (St. John 12:24).

Why does the sower throw wheat into the ground? Does he do this so that the wheat will die and rot? No, he does this so that it would live and bear fruit. In sowing the seed, the sower does not think about the death and decay of the seed, but rather about its life and its yield. Indeed, with joy does the sower sow his seed, not thinking about the death of the seed, but rather about life and fruit-bearing yield.

The Sower is Christ the Lord and men are His wheat. He was pleased to call us wheat. There are many other types of seed on earth but nothing is more priceless than wheat. Why did the Lord sow us throughout the world? So that we should die and decay? No, rather that we should live and bring forth fruit. He alludes to our death along the way. He alludes to death only as a condition for life and multiple yield. The goal of sowing is not death but life. The seed must first die and decay. He only mentions this because He knows that we are fully aware of this. He reminds us of this along the way, whereas His Gospel is primarily a narrative of life, about life and about bringing forth good fruit. He speaks to us a great deal about the latter because He knows that we are not aware of this and that we are suffocating from ignorance and doubt. Not only does He speak to us abundantly about life but He also shows us life. By His resurrection, He demonstrates to us life and the multitude of fruit which is brighter than the sun. The entire history of His Church is a clear map of life.

O Lord of Life, Invincible, save us from a sinful death. Redeem us from a spiritual death.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 10 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS TERENTIUS (TERENCE), AFRICANUS, MAXIMUS, [POMPILIUS] POMPEIUS AND THIRTY-SIX OTHERS WITH THEM

They all suffered for Christ and were crowned with the wreaths of glory during the reign of Emperor Decius. By order of the emperor, the governor of Africa announced to the people that everyone must offer sacrifices to the idols. To those who resisted, the governor threatened with cruel tortures. Upon hearing about these threats many fell away from the Faith and worshipped the idols. However these forty remained unwavering in their faith and were exposed to torture. St. Terentius (Terence) encouraged his companions saying: "Brothers, let us be on guard that we do not deny Christ our God, lest He deny us before His Heavenly Father and Holy Angels." The governor divided them into two groups. Thirty-six of them, after flogging, scrapping of the skin and pouring salt into their open wounds, were all beheaded. The first four they cast into prison with heavy iron chains around their necks, their hands and their feet. An angel of God appeared in the prison, touched the chains of the shackled and the chains fell off. After that, the angel prepared a bountiful table for them and fed them. Once again, they were brought out and tortured and, again, they were imprisoned. Then the governor ordered the soothsayers to gather as many poisonous, loathsome creatures as possible, such as snakes and scorpions and to lock them up in the same cell with the martyrs. The loathsome creatures did not want to touch those chosen by God but rather lay compressed in the corner where they remained for three days. On the third day, when the door of the cell was opened, the repulsive creatures rushed out and bit the soothsayers. Finally, the governor pronounced the death penalty upon the four martyrs. When they were brought out to be beheaded, they rejoicefully chanted Psalms and praised God, Who made them worthy of a martyr's death. They suffered honorably in the year 250 A.D., and were found worthy of the Kingdom.

2. THE SIX-THOUSAND MARTYRS IN GEORGIA

In the wilderness of David-Garejeli in Georgia, there were twelve monasteries in which many monks practiced and lived the ascetical life for centuries. In 1615 A.D., the great king of Persia, Shah Abbas I, attacked Georgia, devastated it and beheaded many Christians. Once while hunting early in the morning on the Feast of the Resurrection, Shah Abbas noticed many lights in the mountains. They were the monks from the twelve monasteries in procession around the Church of the Resurrection with lighted tapers in hand. When the Shah discovered that they were monks, he asked in amazement: "Has not all of Georgia been given over to the sword?" He then ordered his solders to immediately go and behead all the monks. At that moment an angel of God appeared to Abbot Arsenius and informed him of impending death. Arsenius informed his brethren. They all received Communion of the All-Pure Mysteries and prepared themselves for death. Suddenly, the assailants arrived and hacked to pieces, first of all, the abbot, who came before the others and, after that, all the rest. They all suffered honorably and were crowned with incorruptible wreaths in the year 1615 A.D. Thus, ended the history of these famous monasteries which, for more than a thousand years, served as the spiritual hearth of enlightenment for the Georgians. Only two of the monasteries exist today: St. David and St. John the Forerunner. The Georgian Emperor Arcil gathered the relics of the monks and honorably interred them. Even today, these relics emit a sweet-smelling Chrism (oil) and heal the sick.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE SIX-THOUSAND MARTYRS OF GEORGIA

Six-thousand chosen ones of God
They rejoiced in the glorious resurrection,
Six-thousand hearts of men,
The entire flock of innocent lambs!
Around the church, with tapers they processed,
Sweet hymns to the Resurrection they sang,
While the terrible wolf, from the midnight darkness
With hungry wolves attacked,
To slaughter the innocent lambs.
Those were not lambs, but shepherds
The suffering Georgian race,
Saints and illuminators,
All monks, wonderful ascetics.
For all, Arsenius foresaw death,
And spoke thusly to the monks:
Brethren of mine, sons of Georgia,
The hour has come to drink of the cup
The sweet cup of suffering for Christ.
Behold, the wolves rush through the mountains
Faster brethren, to the All-Pure Communion.
And, after that, a bloody baptism!
Repent for yourself and for the people,
And all your thoughts to God, direct,
Your evil doers, you forgive,
The doors of Paradise, for us are opening.
Let every brother, forgive his brother.
Christ is Risen - that we resurrect,
Faithful to Him, we are until we die!

REFLECTION

When a man detaches his mind from earth, opens it toward God with the desire to please God, then God reveals His will in various ways. St. Peter of Damascus writes: "If a man has a full intention to please God, then God teaches him His will either through thoughts, through some other person or through Holy Scripture." Such a man becomes attentive, keen and awaits God's promptings from within and from without. For him, chances cease to exist. The entire world becomes as a ten-stringed harp which does not give out one sound without the finger of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He appeared to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus and they did not recognize Him;
2. How the hearts of these two disciples burned within when He spoke to them and how they recognized Him only when He blessed and broke bread for them;
3. How, all at once, before their eyes the Lord became invisible to them.

HOMILY

-About living hope-

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who in His mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

Brethren, who has dead hope and who has living hope? He who hopes in dead things has a dead hope. He who hopes in the Living God has a living hope.

Further, he who hopes in himself and in other people has a dead hope. He who hopes in the Living God has a living hope.

Further, he who hopes in luck and well-being in this brief earthly existence and does not extend his hope beyond the grave, has a dead hope. He who hopes in the resurrection and eternal life in the kingdom of heaven has a living hope.

Truly, a living hope is better than a dead hope; as life is better than death; as light is better than darkness; as health is better than sickness; as understanding is better than ignorance.

But, Who brought and showed man that living hope; Who, and how? The Apostle Peter gives an answer to that question: Our Lord Jesus Christ and that, by His resurrection from the dead. No one else but the Lord Jesus Christ and by nothing else than His own resurrection from the dead. By His resurrection, the Lord gave wings to the pathetic hopes of man, extended him beyond the grave and showed him the goal, purpose and fruit beyond the grave.

All of this is not confirmed by a credulous man but by an apostle who wavered for a long while in his faith and who denied Christ three times. That is why St. Peter's witness of the resurrected Lord and the significance of His resurrection is inexpressibly priceless for us.

O resurrected Lord, Victor over death, uproot from us dead hope and plant a living hope in us through the prayers of St. Peter, Your great apostle.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR ANTIPAS, BISHOP OF PERGAMUM IN ASIA MINOR

Antipas is mentioned in the Book of Revelation as, "**Antipas, my faithful witness, who was martyred among you, where Satan lives**" (**Revelation 2:13**), i.e., in the city of Pergamum. The inhabitants of this city lived in the darkness of idolatry and in extreme impurity. They were slaves to passions. They were slanderers, tyrants and they were incestuous. In other words, they were the servants of Satan. Here among them lived Antipas, "As a light in the midst of darkness, as a rose among thorns and as gold in mud." He, who captured and killed a Christian, would be deemed as good and just. The totality of pagan belief consisted of soothsaying, interpretation of dreams, serving demons and extreme perversion. Being frightened of Antipas as from fire, the demons appeared to the soothsayers in a dream and confessed how afraid they were of Antipas and how, because of him, they must depart from this city. The pagan priests summoned a large number of people against Antipas and began to interrogate and to force him to deny Christ and to worship idols. Antipas said to them: "When your so-called gods, lords of the universe are frightened of me, a mortal man, and must flee from this city, do you not recognize that, by this, your faith is an aberration?" The saint also spoke to them further about the Faith of Christ as being the only One, True Saving Faith. They became enraged as wild beasts and dragged the aged Antipas to the temple of Artemis before which stood an ox cast in bronze. They heated the bronzed ox and hurled the servant of God into the red-hot molten ox. From within the molten ox, St. Antipas glorified God with thanksgiving, as once did Jonah in the belly of the whale or the Three Youths in the fiery furnace. Antipas prayed for his flock and for the entire world until his soul parted from his weakened body and ascended among the angels into the Kingdom of Christ. He died suffering and was crowned with unfading glory in the year 92 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS PROCESSUS AND MARTINIAN

Processus and Martinian were jailers in the Roman prison where the Apostles Peter and Paul were imprisoned. Hearing the words and witnessing the miracles of the apostles, they were baptized and released the apostles from prison. The apostles left Rome but the Lord, on His way to Rome, appeared to Peter who asked Him: "**Lord where are you going?**" [(**Wither goest Thou?--Domine Quo Vadis?**)] and the Lord answered: "I go to Rome to be crucified a second time." Ashamed, the apostles returned to Rome where they were apprehended and slain. Also slain with the apostles were these two brave martyrs, Processus and Martinian.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ANTIPAS

In a fiery ox as in a luminous temple
Antipas, the Christian, does not suffer loneliness:
In his pure heart, the Lord abides
Neither the fire burns him neither is he in horror of it
The saint for Christ patiently endures all,
And prayers to Christ from the fire, ascend,
Oh, All-Powerful Christ, King of all ages,
For these sufferings, a hundred-fold thanks be to You!
All in me that is sinful, let burn with fire,
That I be more precious according to heavenly worth.
Oh Savior, I pray to You; my flock protect
In this town, in awful dung!
May my blood strengthen them in the Faith,
And their hearts to You be fixed.
And for the heathen, also, O Blessed One I pray to You
Seize them, once and for all, from demonic lies;
And for all sinners, who ridicule Your law,
Direct them to You, the only One to serve.
Behold, all is within the authority of Your Holy Will,
And finally, to You I pray: may it be better for the Church!

REFLECTION

"There can be no rest for those on earth who desire to be saved," says St. Ephrem the Syrian. The struggle is unceasing be it either external or internal. The adversary acts visibly at times through men and other things and at other times, invisibly through thoughts. At times, the adversary appears openly and behaves brutally and cruelly like an enemy and, at other times, under the guise of a flattering friend, he seduces by shrewdness. That which occurs in battle between two opposing armies also occurs to every man individually in battle with the passions of this world. Truly, "There can be no rest for those on earth who desire to be saved." When salvation comes, rest also comes.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How Simon Peter and the other disciple ran quickly to the tomb to confirm the news of the Resurrection;
2. How one after the other entered the tomb and saw the cloths and napkin;
3. How they both saw and believed and, after that, they witnessed and for their witness they died.

HOMILY

-About the two Adams; the Death-creating and the Life-giving-

"For just as in Adam all die, so too, in Christ, shall all be brought to life" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Following Adam's example, life is sown in shame, and following Christ's example, life is raised in glory. Sin is from Adam and justice is from Christ. Weakness and death come from Adam and strength and life come from Christ. Accordingly, in Adam we all die. Accordingly, in Christ, we shall all be brought to life.

That one is the earthly man [Adam], this one is the heavenly man [Christ]. That is the bodily man [Adam] and this is the spiritual man [Christ].

Christ did not resurrect for His sake but for our sake just as He did not die for His sake but for our sake. If His resurrection does not signify our resurrection, then His resurrection is bitterness and not sweetness. Where, then, would the love of God be? Where, then, would the meaning of our miserable earthy experience be? What, then, would be the purpose of Christ's coming to earth?

There, where Adam ends, Christ begins. Adam ends up in the grave and Christ begins with the resurrection from the grave. Adam's generation, i.e., the seed underground that rots and decays, does not see the sun, does not believe that it can emerge from beneath the earth to blossom into a green plant with leaves, flowers and fruit. Christ's generation is a green field upon which wheat grows, turns green, becomes covered with leaves, blossoms and bears much fruit.

"In Adam" does not only mean that we will die one day, rather it means that we are already dead; dead to the last one. **"In Christ"** does not only mean that we will revive one day, but rather that we are already alive, i.e., that the seed in the ground has already begun to germinate and to break through to the light of the sun. The complete expression of death is in the grave, but the complete expression of eternal life is in the kingdom of God.

The mind of the sons of Adam are in accordance with death, reconciled with being decayed and sink even deeper into the ground. The mind of the sons of Christ rebel against death and decay and exert all the more, to burgeon a man toward the light, which the Grace of God helps. O resurrected Lord sober the minds of all the sons of man that they would flee from darkness and destruction and reach out toward the light and life eternal which is in You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE ISAAC THE SYRIAN II

Isaac the Syrian I, is commemorated on January 28. St. Gregory the Dialogues writes about this Isaac II. He came to Italy at the time of the Goths and entered a church to pray in the city of Spoleto. He implored the verger to allow him to remain locked in the church overnight. And so, he spent the entire night in prayer, remaining in the same place. The same thing happened the next day and even the second night. The verger called him a hypocrite and struck him with his fist. Instantly, the verger went insane. Seeing that the verger was bitterly tormented, Isaac leaned over him and the evil spirit departed from him and the verger was restored to health. Upon hearing of this incident, the entire populace of the city thronged around this amazing foreigner. They offered him money and property, but he declined all and accepted nothing and withdrew into the forest where he built a cell for himself, which was rapidly transformed into a large monastery. Isaac was known for working miracles and especially for his special "gift of discernment." On one occasion, he ordered the brethren to carry all the hoes into the vineyard and to leave them there. The next day Isaac, along with the brethren, went out into the vineyard and brought along lunch. The brethren were puzzled. Who was this lunch for, since there were no laborers? Upon arriving at the vineyard, there were as many men digging as there were hoes. This is what happened: these men came as thieves to steal the hoes, but by the power of God, they were detained to dig all night. On another occasion, two partly-clad men came to Isaac and sought clothes from him. Isaac sent a monk to a hollow tree along the road to retrieve what he would find there. The monk departed, found some clothing and brought it to the monastery. The abbot took these clothes and gave them to the beggars. The beggars were extremely ashamed when they recognized their own clothes which they had hidden in this tree. Once, a man sent two beehives to the monastery. The monk hid one along the way and the other he brought to the monastery and turned it over to the abbot. The saint said to him: "Be careful upon your return. For in the beehive that you left along the way, a poisonous snake had slithered into it. Be careful, therefore, that it does not bite you."

2. SAINT BASIL THE CONFESSOR

At the time of the Iconoclastic controversy, this devout man was bishop in the town of Parius in Asia Minor. He refused to sign an imperial document against the veneration of icons. For that, Basil was greatly persecuted and severely tortured. He remained as firm as a diamond in His Orthodoxy. He died at the beginning of the eighth century and was translated to the Lord.

3. THE VENERABLE ACACIUS

Acacius was from the village of Gollitsa in Epirus. He was a great Athonite ascetic, spiritual father and possessed the "gift of discernment." Acacius had many heavenly visions. He gave his blessings to several monks who chose the mortification of martyrdom. Acacius died in his ninety-eighth year in the year 1730 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE ATHANASIA

Athanasia was born on the island of Aeginia of wealthy and benevolent parents. She distributed her wealth to the poor and retreated to a convent. There she took upon herself greater and more difficult mortifications. Athanasia took food only once a day and that, only bread and water. During the Honorable Fast [Lenten Season], she ate once every other day. She tasted oil and fish only on the Feasts of the Nativity and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though she was the abbess of this convent, Athanasia was a servant to the other sisters and shied away from having anyone serve her. Athanasia was made worthy of the great gift of working miracles, both, during her life and after death. She died in the Lord in the year 860 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ATHANASIA

Athanasia, most beautiful soul,
On earth, shone like a bright star,
By the spirit, bodily weakness overcame,
While still young, fell in love with God;
Through fasting and vigils, her body she withered,
Only to attain salvation for her soul;
Property much, to the poor she distributed,
All of herself, to the will of God, she gave.
A vision she saw in the church, holy:
A heavenly light, the darkness penetrated,
And a voice to her came: Athanasia,
Meekness and humbleness; that is pleasing to God,
In this, practice above all else
While your heart beats and your spirit breathes.
Athanasia, that counsel she fulfilled -
And, all pride in herself she crushed,
Her will to God, she totally gave,
Obedient to God, as the blazing sun.
Love, with Love, the Lord returned
And with Grace, He rewarded her labors.
And when her time on earth was over
He granted her life, immortal and paradiscal.

REFLECTION

The wicked Emperor Constantine Copronymos had a virtuous daughter, the maiden, Anthusa: "A beautiful branch on a wicked tree." Despite all the pressure placed on her by her father to marry, Anthusa remained adamant, for she was firmly attached with a sincere love for Christ the Lord. When her father died, Anthusa distributed her entire estate to the poor, entered a convent and was tonsured a nun. How much for astonishment are the many noble men who left the vanity of this world and followed the narrow path of Christ; twice as much for astonishment are the many women who despised both, youth and riches and the transitory attractions of this world for the love of Christ. Our Lord Himself said: "**It would be hard for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven**" (St. Matthew 19:23). Difficult yes, but not impossible. For him, who despises himself, it is easy to despise the riches of the entire world.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He enters through closed doors among His disciples and gives them peace;
2. How His glorified body does not have any material obstacles to appear wherever He wants.

HOMILY

-About the city which is being built-

"For here, we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

Brethren, where are the great cities of Babylon and Nineveh? Today, only lizards lay in the dust of their towers. Memphis and Thebes, were they not the pride of the pharaohs and the princes of mankind? Today, it is difficult to establish the exact place where these two cities were located.

However, let us leave these cities of stones and bricks. Let us look at the cities of blood, flesh and bones. Men fashion the city of their bodies more slowly and more painstakingly than they fashion fortresses and cathedrals. Men spend about eighty to a hundred years to fashion the cities of their bodies and, in the end, see that their effort is in vain. That which took them decades to fashion with care and constant fear, collapses into the dust of the grave in the twinkling of an eye. Whose bodily city is not toppled over and turned into dust? Not anyones.

But, let us leave the cities of the body. Let us look at the cities of fortune which men have built from generation to generation. The materials of which these cities were built are: good times, pleasure, property, authority, honor and glory. Where are these cities? As a cob-web they spin around man in an instant and as a cob web they break and vanish, making the fortunate more unfortunate than the unfortunate.

Truly, we have no city here that will remain.

This is why we seek the city which is to come. This is the city built of Spirit, Life and Truth. This is the city whose one and only architect is the Lord Jesus Christ. This city is called the Kingdom of Heaven, Eternal Life, the dwelling place of the angels, the haven of saints and refuge of martyrs. In this city, there is no dualism of either good or evil but, everything is a harmony of good. Everything that is built in this city is built to last forever. Every brick in this city remains without end and termination. The bricks are living angels and men. In this city the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ sits on the throne and reigns.

O resurrected Lord, redeem us from beneath the ruins of time and lead us mercifully into Your eternal city of Heaven.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIEST-MARTYR ARTEMON

Artemon was a priest in Laodicea during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. Before his tormenting judge, he spoke of himself: "I am called Artemon, a slave of Christ, my God. For sixteen years I was a lector and read books in the Church of my God. For twenty-eight years, I was a deacon and read the Holy Gospel. With the help of Christ, I have fulfilled thirty-three years as a presbyter teaching men and placing them on the path of salvation." The judge brought him to the temple of Aesculapius, where the soothsayers nursed large reptiles dedicated to this "god." They all assumed that the snakes would bite Artemon. Artemon crossed himself and by the power of the cross nailed all the snakes to the ground rendering them unable to move. After that, he brought them all out into the courtyard, breathed upon them and all of them died instantly. All of the soothsayers were in great fear. Upon seeing this miracle, Vitalis, the chief soothsayer of this temple, fell to his knees before Artemon and cried out: "Great is the Christian God!" The martyr then baptized him along with several of his friends. The malicious judge remained persistent in his malice and tortured the aged Artemon in various ways. Once, he wanted to throw him into a vat of boiling pitch but, he fell off his horse into the pitch and he himself was incinerated. Two eagles were seen who swooped down upon the judge, lifted him from the horse and dropped him into the pitch. St. Artemon remained free for a period of time and traveled about, always accompanied with his two beloved deer, and instructed the people. Again, he was captured and was beheaded in the year 303 A.D. and his soul took up habitation in the Kingdom of Christ our God, Whom St. Artemon faithfully served.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR CRESCENS

Crescens was from the city of Myra in Lycia. He was an honored and well known citizen. He openly confessed his faith in Christ and mocked the dead idols. Because of that he was burned to death by the pagans.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR THOMAS

Thomas was born in Alexandria of honorable parents. She was taught piety from her youth. At the age of fifteen, she was married to an honorable man. Her father-in-law was a vile old man and in the absence of his son, attacked his daughter-in-law and desired to seduce her. Becoming terrified, Thomas, in fear reminded her father-in-law of the Law of God and slipped out of his hands. After a prolonged struggle, the father-in-law drew a knife and murdered his daughter-in-law and then cut her in half. At that moment, the punishment of God fell upon him. He was blinded instantly and was unable to find the door from which to leave. Here, in this room, he was apprehended in the act and turned over to the court which sentenced him to death. Thus, Thomas suffered for the Commandment of God regarding spousal fidelity and chastity. After that, many who would be tempted by adulterous passions directed their prayers to St. Thomas and received strong assistance from her. Daniel the great ascetic, translated her relics to the Scete [Monastery] and buried them in the cemetery of the heirmen [priest-monks]. St. Thomas suffered in the year 476 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THOMAS

Whoever suffers because of his evil deeds
Does not have a share with the angels:
Whoever suffers for the will of God,
And for the sake of Christ, misfortunes endures,
Either from the faithful or from the unfaithful,
That one, will gaze upon the face of God.
Thomas, handmaiden of God,
According to her heart, was, a true, devoutly-praying person [Bogomoljka].
But, for the sake of God's law, she suffered
From her father-in-law, arrogant.
Leave, O father-in-law, my poor body alone!
Of the Most High God are you not afraid?
The human body, even though it is plain mud
Because of the soul, by God, to us, it is given.
If, with sin, the body we defile,
Of our soul, we are breaking the wings,
From the Living God, we are separating it,
And to the unclean one, we give it as a booty.
From passion blind, the father-in-law axed her to pieces;
May God forgive! The righteous one uttered.
But to the murderer, blindness befell -
The two-fold blindman, around Hades crawls.

REFLECTION

When they brought the martyr Crescens, a nobleman of Myra in Lycia, to court the judge, in order to persuade him to worship idols, counseled him for a long time. When he did not succeed, he finally said to Crescens: "Worship [idols] only in the body and bow down before your God in the spirit!" To that, the honorable Crescens replied: "The body cannot do anything independent of the soul, which is its driving force and leader." For that Crescens was killed. An obvious lesson that a Christian cannot be duplicitous. Still another lesson: A Christian has an obligation to serve his Creator even with the body and not only with the soul. By this is refuted the false position of certain Christians who live physically as pagans and meanwhile praise themselves that they believe in God and love God with their souls. They divide themselves in two and place themselves in the service of two masters, even though the holiest lips [The Lips of Jesus Christ] proclaimed that as an impossibility.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How because of Thomas, momentarily, the only one unbelieving among the disciples, He appeared again in His glorified Body;
2. How Thomas, believed again, when he placed his finger on the scars of the wounds of the All-Pure Body of the Lord and believed.

HOMILY

-About the test by Thomas-

"My Lord and my God" (St. John 20:28).

When the Apostle Thomas felt the wounds of the Lord Jesus, he cried out: **"My Lord and my God!"**

When Mary Magdalene heard the voice of the resurrected One in her soul, she cried out: **"My Lord and my God!"**

When Saul saw the light and heard the words of the resurrected One, he acknowledged: **"My Lord and my God!"**

When the pagans, in amazement, observed how the countless numbers of martyrs joyfully undergo pains and asked them: "Who is this Christ?" All of them replied: **"My Lord and my God!"**

When the scoffers ridiculed the army of ascetics and asked them: "Who is He, for Whom they took upon themselves the awesome burden of mortification? They all had one answer: **"My Lord and my God!"**

When the scorners derided the virgins who vowed their virginity and asked them: "Who is He for Whom they renounced marriage?" They all had one answer: **"My Lord and my God!"**

When the avaricious in astonishment asked the very wealthy: "Who is He for Whom they distribute their wealth and become beggarly?" All of them replied, one and the same: **"My Lord and my God!"**

Some have seen Him and have said: **"My Lord and my God!"** Some have only heard Him and said: **"My Lord and my God!"** Some have only felt Him and said: **"My Lord and my God!"** Some have only observed Him in the fabric of events and in the destinies of peoples and said: **"My Lord and my God!"** Some have felt His presence in their lives and cried out: **"My Lord and my God!"** Some have recognized Him by some sign, on themselves or on others, and cried out: **"My Lord and my God!"** Still some have only heard about Him from others and believed and cried out: **"My Lord and my God!"** Truly, these last ones are the most blessed!

Let us also exclaim, with all our hearts, regardless of how we have come to recognize Him or how we have come to learn about Him: **"My Lord and my God!"**

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT MARTIN THE CONFESSOR, POPE OF ROME

Martin became pope on July 5, 649 A.D., at the time of the furious debates between the Orthodox and the Monothelete heretics, who adhered to the belief in a single will in Christ. Reigning at that time was Constans II, the grandson of Heraclius. The Patriarch of Constantinople was Paul. In order to establish peace in the Church, the emperor compiled a booklet, entitled Type [Typos] which was very favorable to the heretics. Pope Martin convoked a Council of one-hundred five bishops (in the Church of the Holy Savior in the Lateran Palace in October) which condemned this pamphlet of the emperor. At the same time, the pope wrote a letter to Patriarch Paul imploring him to adhere to the purity of the Orthodox Faith and to counsel the emperor to renounce this heretical sophistry. This letter angered both the emperor and the patriarch. The emperor dispatched Olympius, one of his commanders, to Rome to bring the pope to Constantinople in bonds. The commander did not dare to bind the pope but bribed a soldier to slay him in church with a sword. When the soldier entered the church with the concealed sword, he was instantly blinded. Thus, by the Providence of God, Martin escaped death. At that time, the Saracens attacked Sicily and Olympius was ordered to Sicily and there he died. Then, according to the intrigue of the heretical Patriarch Paul, the emperor dispatched Theodore, another commander, to bind the pope and to bring him to Constantinople under the accusation that he, Pope Martin, was in collaboration with the Saracens and does not honor the All-Pure Mother of God. When the commander arrived in Rome and read the accusation against him, Pope Martin responded that: "This was slanderous and that he has no association with the Saracens, the adversaries of Christianity. As regards the All-Pure Mother of God; if one does not honor her and does not confess her and does not reverence her, let him be cursed in this world and in the next." However, this did not alter the decision of the commander. Pope Martin was bound and brought to Constantinople where he lay for a long time in prison, painfully ill, suffering from anxiety and hunger, until finally, he was sentenced to exile to Cherson. Pope Martin lived for two years in exile and died in the year 655 A.D., offering his soul to the Lord, for Whom he suffered much. Two years prior to Pope Martin's death, the repentant Paul died. When the emperor visited him before his death, Paul turned his head toward the wall and wept, confessing that he had greatly sinned against Pope Martin and begged the emperor to release him.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ANTHONY, JOHN AND EUSTACE [EUSTATHIUS]

All three were pagans and, at first, were fire worshippers. All of them were servants in the palace of the Lithuanian Prince Olgard in Vilna. They were formerly called: KRUGLETZ, KUMETZ AND NEZILO. All three were baptized by Nestor, the priest. All three were hanged, one after the other on the same oak tree in the year 1347 A.D. Christians cut down the tree and erected a church in honor of the Holy Trinity. The revered relics of these martyrs were then placed in this church and a holy altar table was carved from the stump of the oak tree. Their relics repose in Vilna.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR ARDALION, THE ACTOR

At first Ardalion was an actor-comedian. For the sake of entertaining the people, he eagerly played the role of a martyr for the Faith deriding Christians in every possible manner. When a persecution surfaced during the reign of Emperor Maximian, his spirit completely changed. In front of the crowd, he cried out in a loud voice that he is a Christian and that he was not jesting. For this, Ardalion was condemned, suffered for Christ and died tied to a red hot framework of rods thus portraying a true and honorable role of a martyr.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MARTIN

Saint Martin the Pope, before the Senate speaks:
May my body be crushed and burned,
And the most cruel sufferings, I will joyfully endure;
But, the True Faith, I will not deny.
The Good Savior was God and Man,
Two natures different with two wills, He bore,
But, two natures in one person,
And, both wills in a single light.
Such a Faith, all the Fathers passed on to us,
For such a Faith, many suffered.
May I suffer also; of all, the least
The servant of my Lord, of all the most sinful!
Thus, Martin confessed his faith to all
And truth did he speak before the heretics.
O what is the worth of man when he fears God:
Above little men, he [Martin] stands as a mountain!

REFLECTION

"It is befitting for a monk to love God as a son and to fear Him [God] as a slave," says St. Evgarius. Naturally, this is also befitting to every Christian, even though he might not be a monk. It is a great art for anyone to unite love for God and to have fear of God. Many other Holy Fathers whenever they speak about love for God, at the same time, also mention fear of God, and vice-versa. In his homily: "On Perfect Love," St. John Chrysostom speaks about suffering and the pains of Hell at the same time. Why? Because the great love of man toward God without fear, imperceptibly crosses over into pride and then, again, a great fear of God without love leads to despair.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He appeared to the disciples on the shore of the lake and addresses them as **"children"** (St. John 21:5) .
2. How He fills their nets again with fish and they knew Him but did not dare to ask Him, **"Who are You?"** (St. John 21:12).

HOMILY

-About the personal experience of all the apostles-

**"What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes,
what we looked upon and touched with our hands
---We proclaim now to you" (1 St. John 1:1).**

Behold, such is the apostolic preaching! The apostles do not speak as worldly sages, nor like philosophers and even less as theoreticians who make suppositions about something in order to discover something. The apostles speak about things which they have not sought but which unexpectedly surrounded them; about the fact which they did not discover but, so to speak, unexpectedly found them and seized them. They did not occupy themselves with spiritual researches nor have they studied psychology, neither did they, much less, occupy themselves with spiritism. Their occupation was fishing - one totally experiential physical occupation. While they were fishing, the God-Man [Jesus] appeared to them and cautiously and slowly introduced them to a new vocation in the service of Himself. At first, they did not believe Him but they, still more cautiously and slowly with fear and hesitation and much wavering, came toward Him and recognized Him. Until the apostles saw Him many times with their own eyes and until they discussed Him many times among themselves and, until they felt Him with their own hands, their experienced fact is supernatural but their method of recognizing this fact is thoroughly sensory and positively learned. Not even one contemporary scholar would be able to use a more positive method to know Christ. The apostles saw not only one miracle but numerous miracles. They heard not only one lesson but many lessons which could not be contained in numerous books. They saw the resurrected Lord for forty days; they walked with Him, they conversed with Him, they ate with Him, and they touched Him. In a word: they personally and first handedly had thousands of wondrous facts by which they learned and confirmed one great fact, i.e., that Christ is the God-Man, the Son of the Living God, the Man-loving Savior of mankind and the All-Powerful Judge of the living and the dead.

O resurrected Lord confirm us in the faith and ardor of Your Holy Apostles.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 15 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES ARISTARCHUS, PUDENS AND TROPHIMUS

They were numbered among the Seventy Apostles. Aristarchus was bishop of Apamea in Syria. The Apostle Paul mentions him several times. **"The city was filled with confusion and the people rushed with one accord into the theater, seizing Gaius and Aristarchus" (Acts of the Apostles 19:29). "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you greetings, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions) if he comes to you, receive him" (Colossians 4:10). "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as well as Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my co-workers" (Philemon 1:23,24).** Aristarchus was captured in Ephesus with Gaius by a multitude of people who had risen up against Paul. The Apostle Paul writes to the Colossians: **"Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner sends you his greetings" (Colossians 4:10).** In the Epistle to Philemon, Paul calls Aristarchus "my co-worker" together with Mark, Demas and Luke.

Pudens was a distinguished citizen of Rome. The Apostle Paul mentions him once. **"Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers send greetings"(2 Timothy 4:21).** At first, the home of Pudens was a haven for the Chief Apostles [Peter and Paul] and later it was converted into a place of worship, called the **Shepherd's Church**.

Trophimus was from Asia. **"Sopater, the son of Pyrrhus, from Beroea, accompanied him, as did Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia" (Acts of the Apostles 20:4).** He accompanied the apostle on his travel. In one place the Apostle Paul writes: **"I left Trophimus sick at Miletus" (2 Timothy 4:20).**

During the reign of Nero's persecution, when the Apostle Paul was beheaded, all three of these glorious apostles were also beheaded.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR SABAS OF GOTHLAND [SABAS THE GOTH]

In Gothland, there was a brutal persecution against Christians. A certain prince of the Goths [Atharidus] entered the village where this devout Sabas lived and asked the villagers: "Are there any Christians living in your village?" They convinced him by swearing that there are none. Then Sabas stood before the prince and the people and said: "Let no one swear for me; I am a Christian!" Upon seeing Sabas, wretched and poor, the prince let him go in peace saying: "This one can neither harm nor benefit anyone." The following year, around Easter, a certain priest Sansala came to this village and celebrated the glorious Feast of the Pascha [Resurrection] with Sabas. Upon learning of this, the heathens suddenly attacked the home of Sabas and began to beat this holy man of God unmercifully with canes and, besides this, they dragged the naked body of Sabas through thorns and then tied both Sabas and Sansala to a tree and offered them the meat of the idolatrous sacrifices to eat. These men of God called to mind the words of the apostles and refused to eat of the unclean sacrifices of the devil. Finally, Prince Atharidus condemned Sabas to death and handed him over to the soldiers. Full of joy, Sabas arrived at the scaffold praising God. Recognizing him as a good man, the soldiers wanted to release him along the way and, because of that, Sabas became very sorrowful and said to the soldiers that they are duty-bound to carry out the order of the prince. The soldiers then brought him to the Mussovo river [at Targoviste, Romania, near Bucharest] tied a stone around his neck and tossed him into the water. His body was washed up along the shore. Later on, during the reign of Emperor Valens when the Greek Commander Ioannis Soranos was warring with the Goths, he discovered the body of Sabas and translated it to Cappadocia. Sabas, the saint, suffered at the age of 31 in the year 372 A.D.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYRS BASILISSA AND ANASTASIA

Basilissa and Anastasia were two pious and devout Romans. During the reign of Emperor Nero, they gathered the slain bodies of the disciples of the apostles and buried them with honor. For this, they were accused and imprisoned. After prolonged torture, during which their breasts and tongues were severed, they were finally beheaded.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS

Martyrs radiant, their blood they shed,
And the entire black earth, with their blood they stained
The fire was powerful in which they were burned,
But, more powerful the love, with which they loved Christ.
For the greatest good, a martyr to be
With what kind of riches, can this be compared?
All-victorious Christ, the King of that age,
Your brave souls in heaven welcomed.
From the hands of the angels, He took them to Himself,
And all your weighty pains, He blessed.

REFLECTION

Concerning contemplation, St. Gregory Sinaites writes: "We confirm that there are eight principle subjects for contemplation: **First**, God, invisible and unseen; without beginning and uncreated; the First Cause of everything that exists; Triune; the one and only pre-existing Divinity; **Second**, the order and rank of rational powers: [the bodiless powers of heaven; the angelic world]; **Third**, the composition of visible things; **Fourth**, the plan of the Incarnation of the Word; **Fifth**, the general resurrection; **Sixth**, the awesome second coming (Second Advent) of Christ; **Seventh**, eternal torment; **Eighth**, the Kingdom of Heaven. The first four have already been revealed and belong to the past. The last four have not yet been revealed and belong to the future, even though these four are clearly contemplated by those who, with the help of acquired Grace, attained complete purity of mind. Whosoever approaches this task of contemplation without the illumination of Grace, let him know that he is building fantasies and does not possess the art of contemplation." Thus wrote the great and discerning Gregory Sinaites who, that which he knows, he knows from personal experience.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How he is concerned about the physical nourishment of His disciples; How He breaks and blesses bread for the disciples in Emmaus;
2. How by the shore of the lake he asked His disciples: "**Have you caught anything to eat?**" (St. John 21:5). When they answered Him that they have not, He prepared bread and fish and gave it to them.

HOMILY

-About how we will resemble Him Whom we love-

"Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Until now, we were slaves and now we are the children of God. We were the slaves of evil and now we are the servants of good; the supreme good in heaven and on earth. We were slaves to all of that which is lower and worse than man and now, we will serve the All-Highest and the All-Good. We were squashed by darkness and now, we will labor in the light. Until now, the devil, sin and death held us in continual fear and now, we will live close to God in freedom and joy.

Now, when now? Now, when the Lord appeared on earth in the flesh, when He gave us the knowledge of light, freedom and life; when He gloriously resurrected and manifested Himself in His glorified body; when He fulfilled all the prophecies of the prophets and all of His promises. Now we, too, are the children of God: "**The sons of light and the heirs of the Kingdom.**"

"We shall be like Him." Truly, this has not yet materialized but He has manifested Himself and, for now, that is sufficient. He Himself showed how beautiful man is in the resurrection and we know that we will also be the same as He. The Apostle John says: "**We know that we shall be like Him.**" He does not say we suspect or it has been told to us but he does say: "**We know that we shall be like Him.**" For He did not resurrect for His sake, but for our sake. He did not resurrect from the grave, only to show His power to the dead who are without hope, but to assure the dead that they, too, will live again and to show them how they will be when they become enlivened. Neither did the apostles write: "**We know,**" because of their vanity before the ignorant, but because of brotherly love toward man, that all men may know the same and "**that we may also know.**"

O resurrected Lord, confirm in us also this saving knowledge through the prayers of Your Holy Apostles.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 16 -

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYRS AGAPE, CHIONIA AND IRENE

All three were sisters from the vicinity of Aquileia. When Emperor Diocletian was staying in Aquileia he ordered that the distinguished spiritual father Chrysogonus be killed. At that time, an aged Presbyter Zoilus had a vision in which the location of the unburied body of Chrysogonus was revealed. Hurrying, the elder found the martyred body of Chrysogonus, placed it in a sarcophagus and kept it in his home. Thirty days later, St. Chrysogonus appeared to him and informed him that, in the course of nine days, those three maidens would suffer martyrdom and that he, too, would also die at that time. The same news was received in a vision by Anastasia, [a woman endowed with moral and spiritual insight], who had followed the example of her teacher, Chrysogonus. Indeed, after nine days the Elder Zoilus died and those three sisters were brought to trial before the emperor. The emperor urged these three maidens to worship the idols, but they all refused and confessed their steadfast faith in Christ. Irene said to the emperor: "How stupid it is to worship things made of stone and wood, which were ordered for an agreed price and made by the hands of a mortal man." The enraged emperor cast them into prison. When the emperor departed for Macedonia, all slaves and prisoners were taken with him, among whom were these three saintly maidens. The emperor turned them over to a certain Commander Dulcitius for torturing. This commander, inflamed by dark passion, wanted to defile the virgins however, when the commander attempted to enter the prison while the virgins were praying to God he went insane. He fell among the black cauldrons and pots before the gates and began to embrace and kiss them and departed sooty and blackened. The emperor upon hearing about this incident ordered that another commander, Sisinius, take over the trial of these sisters. After prolonged torture, the judge condemned the first two sisters to death by burning and he detained Irene for a while longer hoping to defile her. But, when he sent Irene to the brothel with the soldiers, an angel of God saved this chaste virgin and staved off these soldiers and brought her to a hill. The next day, the commander with his soldiers went to this hill and were unable to ascend it. He then ordered that Irene be shot with arrows. St. Anastasia [the disciple of Chrysogonus] gathered the bodies of these three sisters into one place and honorably buried them. They all suffered honorably for Christ the King and Lord about the year 304 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR LEONIDES AND WITH HIM THE FEMALE MARTYRS: CHARIESSA, NICE, GALINA, CALLIS, NUNECHIA, BASILLISSA AND THEODORA

They were thrown into the sea but the sea received them not. They walked upon the sea as upon dry land and sang to God: "One field of battle, I ran O Lord, and the army pursued me; O Lord I did not deny You; O Lord, save my soul!" Seeing them the heathens, at first, were amazed but after that tied stones around their necks and again threw them into the depths of the sea and they drowned. They all suffered honorably for Christ the King and Lord in the year 281 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYRS AGAPIA, CHIONA AND IRENE

Chaste souls, chaste bodies,
As three lilies, pure and white,
Three sisters, heroines,
The golden chests of the Holy Spirit,
Blood, they spilled; their life they gave,
Crowned with wreaths.
Agapia, love pure,
Chiona, glistens as the snow,
And Irene, the name of peace.
In torments as in the midst of a feast
Glorified the Living God
And the resurrected Lord:
Most High God, whatever we have
Behold, to You, we give all:
Body, soul and all pains -
All You receive into Your hands!
From the molten fire, save the body,
From eternal wrath, save the soul!
O, thanks be to You, that You created us,
And even made us worthy of sufferings!
Three sisters, three virgins,
Martyrs, for the sake of the Trinity.

REFLECTION

A story of the Elder Barlaam. A certain man had three friends. Two of them he loved sincerely, but with tedium, he avoided the third. It so happened that the king summoned this man before him to render account and to repay his debt. He turned for help to his first friend who rejected him and departed. He then turned to his second friend but even he did not help him. With shame, he then turned to the third friend and he joyfully accompanied him before the king. **The interpretation is this: the first friend is wealth; the second friend is a relative; the third friend is the good works of men in this world. The king is God** Who, through death, sends summons and seeks payment of debt. A dying man seeks help in his wealth, but it turns away and passes on immediately into the hands of another owner. He then turns to his relatives, but his relatives send him off alone and they remain. Then, he reminds himself of his good works, which he carried out with tedium and these immediately accompany him on the path in the presence of the King and Judge. He, who has ears to hear, let him hear. The only companions of the soul to the other world are the works of man, be they good or be they bad. All of that which was dear and precious to man, leaves him and turns from him. Only his works, to the very last one, accompany him. He, who has a mind to understand, let him understand.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How according to the testimony of St. Paul He appeared alive to five hundred people at once; **"After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:6);**
2. How He appeared to the Apostle James and, again, according to the testimony of the Apostle Paul: **"After that, He appeared to James, then to all the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:7);**
3. How at the time of the Apostle Paul, there were still living many outside the circle of the apostles, who had seen Him.

HOMILY

-About sobering up from sin-

"Become sober as you ought and stop sinning" (1 Corinthians 15:34).

The Apostle Paul gives this commandment in relation to the resurrection of Christ. Since he had enumerated many proofs of the resurrection of the Lord, he decisively commands the faithful to sober up as is needed and not to sin anymore.

Why does the apostle place our sobriety on the dependence of the resurrection of the Lord? Because the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the main rebuttal to sinning. And, because nothing else in this world can turn us away from sinning as the knowledge that the Lord resurrected from the grave and now, sits alive on the Throne of Glory and is awaiting us on His judgment. Sinning, after that knowledge, is completely absurd. Sobering up from sinning, after that knowledge, is perfectly natural and reasonable.

"Become sober as your ought!" Not half-heartedly, but completely. Dismiss from your minds even the remembrance of sin. For sin is like a plant which can grow even in the most parched places. One drop of moisture and, seemingly, a withered plant becomes green. One remembrance of a seemingly long forgotten dead sin makes it come alive and causes it to become stronger.

The heathens and sinners, who did not have the example of the resurrection of the dead and are sinning, will have some kind of justification at the Judgment. They will say: "There was nothing so powerful that could have sobered us up from sinning. We believed that the grave was the last delta of the river of human life, for we did not have any proof of life after death." Thus, will the heathens speak? But, how will you Christians justify yourselves, you who learned of the resurrection of Christ and have not sobered up; you who have heard so many testimonies of the resurrection and the judgment and yet you continue to sin? How are you going to justify yourselves?

My brethren, sober up for once as you should and do not sin for Christ is risen from the grave. O resurrected and living Lord, help us to sober up from sin once and for all.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR SIMEON, PERSIAN BISHOP

During the reign of the wicked Emperor Sapor [Savori], Simeon was tortured for Christ along with his two presbyters, Audel and Ananias. The emperor's eunuch, Ustazan, who had earlier denied Christ and afterward, touched by the rebuke of St. Simeon, again, confessed the True Faith before the emperor. A thousand other Christians were also led to the place of execution with Simeon. Simeon intentionally moved out of the way in order to be the last one to be beheaded so as to encourage the other Christians to the end, so that, not one of them would waver because of their fear of death. When the presbyter Ananias placed his head on the chopping block, his entire body quivered. The emperor's court clerk Fusik, who secretly was a Christian, began to encourage Ananias saying: "Do not be afraid old man, close your eyes and be brave so that you may see the divine light." As soon as Fusik said this, he was recognized as a Christian and was accused before the emperor. The emperor exhausted him through great torture, as well as his daughter, the maiden Askitria. After St. Simeon saw his flock depart to the other world, he was finally beheaded. The following year on Great Friday (Good Friday), Azat [Ustazan], the beloved eunuch of the emperor, was also slain for Christ and with him a thousand other faithful. Then the emperor mourned for his eunuch and suspended the further killing of Christians. They all suffered honorably for Christ the King and Lord in the year 341 or 344 A.D.

2. SAINT ACACIUS, BISHOP OF MELITENE

Acacius lived the ascetical life in the place where he was born, i.e., in Melitene, Armenia. Blessed Otreius, bishop of that city, who participated at the Second Ecumenical Council [Constantinople 381 A.D.], ordained him a presbyter. Following the death of Otreius, Acacius became a bishop. He participated at the Third Ecumenical Council [Ephesus 431 A.D.], which condemned the evil blasphemy of Nestorius against the Mother of God. Here, together with St. Cyril of Alexandria, Acacius zealously fought for the purity of the Orthodox Faith. St. Acacius possessed much Grace from God and worked many miracles. After long and zealous service to God, Acacius died peacefully in the year 435 A.D.

3. SAINT AGAPITUS, POPE OF ROME

Agapitus was sent to the Emperor Justinian in Constantinople by Theodahad, the King of the Goths, to dissuade him from his campaign against the Goths. Enroute, he healed a mute and blind person. In Constantinople, Agapitus assisted in confirming Orthodoxy and died in the year 536 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLES SABATIUS AND ZOSIMUS

Sabatius and Zosimus were the co-founders of the ascetical [monastic] community on the Solovetz Island in the White Sea. Many great saints were glorified in the Solovetz Community. St. Sabatius died in 1435 A.D., and Zosimus died in 1478 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ZOSIMUS

On an isolated island in the midst of the stormy sea,
Beyond the vanity of the world and beyond conversation,
Zosimus, his soul nourishes with prayers
Defends his soul from demons with the Name of God.
Vicious demons became embittered against him
And all of their power, against him, directed.
To them, Zosimus speaks: In vain is your effort
As long as the mighty hand of God protects me.
To slay me, is it the will of God?
Then strike quickly and time, do not waste!
Why do you change yourselves into beasts and serpents?
Into angry wolves, tigers and scorpions,
When you do not have the strength as much as shadows,
In order to do me some kind of harm.
You are dreadful only for the sons of sin
And for the lovers of pleasure and laughter.
But, for the lovers of Christ's yoke,
The Mother of God and pure asceticism,
You are as the fog, which the wind carries,
Which, for a moment conveys it and, for a moment, carries it away.
If the fog, a rock is able to uproot,
Then me a sinner, you are able to sway!
Leave me alone, I give not myself over to you
I am the servant of Christ; I look up to Christ.

REFLECTION

After the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon, 451 A.D.] the heretical Emperor Anastasius banished the Orthodox Patriarchs, Elias of Jerusalem and Flavian of Antioch, into exile. One day simultaneously, both of the saints, discerned the death of the heretical emperor and sent each other the news about this saying: "Anastasius is dead! Let us also go to stand judgment with him before God." The emperor died and two days later both patriarchs died. What zeal for the True Faith! What a humble hope before God's judgment. For these saints, it was not a matter of living longer on earth but the matter of God's truth. Neither did they say: "We judged him," rather "may God judge him!" Our stay on earth is not for the sake of sojourning but for personal choice for good or for evil; for truth or for falsehood. Blessed are we if we, in everything, trust God's will and hope in God's judgment. For in all, one must have a strong faith. These Orthodox archpastors had a strong faith. St. Acacius also had a strong faith. Once, during a great drought when the people were despairing, this wonderful Acacius led a procession of the people throughout the town and outside the town. He ordered that the Divine Liturgy be celebrated outside the town before the Church of St. Eustace. After consecrating the Holy Gifts, Acacius did not want to pour water into the wine but prayed to God that He, the Most-High, lower water into the chalice from the clouds. God heard the prayer of His faithful servant and sent abundant rain in the dry fields as well as into the honorable chalice.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How forty days after the resurrection He still remains on earth showing Himself to the faithful and strengthening them in the Faith;
2. How by His forty day manifestation, He demonstrates that He did not resurrect for His sake but for the sake of mankind.

HOMILY

-About the wonderful promise of Christ-

"I will give the victor the right to sit with Me on My throne" (Revelation 3:21).

This, brethren, is the promise of Christ, the Victor over the devil, sin and death.

But the devil, sin and death are stronger than man. Who can overcome them? No one, except Christ and those who stand firm with Christ and with His weapons enter into battle.

The devil is as old as the world and even older than the world. How can man, whose life-span is measured with a pendulum, defeat him who, for many thousands of years, learns to wage battle against man? How can a mortal overpower all the temptation of the devil, whose number equals the number of sins on earth? By no means, if he does not know that the Lord Jesus conquered the three main types of diabolical temptations on the high mountain. By no means, if a man does not remain firm and steadfast along side Christ Who is older than time and mightier than all the angels, both evil and good.

Sin is as old as the devil. How can man, whose life-span is measured by a pendulum, avoid sin which, as a contagious disease and evil odor, is passed from generation to generation, from man to man since man exists on such an earth? By no means, if he does not know that there existed one Man, the One and Only, Who did not commit sin, neither in birth nor after birth; the God-Man Jesus Christ Who, through the humbleness of His humanity and the fire of His Divinity, crushed sin on the Cross. By no means, if a man does not stand firm with Christ Who is older than sin and Who is mightier than all of the sowers and carriers of sin.

Death is as old as man expelled from Paradise. How can a man, whose life span is measured by a pendulum, conquer death in this worldly grave? By no means, if he does not acknowledge the power of the Cross and the suffering of Christ and the truth of His resurrection from the grave. By no means, if he does not stand firm with Christ, the Almighty Victor over death.

O what a glorious reward for those who achieve victory! They will be seated, crowned with wreaths of glory, on the throne of the greatest Victor on earth and in heaven!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 18 -

1. VENERABLE JOHN, THE DISCIPLE OF SAINT GREGORY DECAPOLIS

At the time of the Iconoclastic heresy, Emperor Leo the Armenian subjected John to torture along with his teacher Gregory and St. Joseph the Hymnographer. When Gregory departed this life, John became the abbot of the Decapolis Monastery in Constantinople. Having become abbot, he intensified his ascetical efforts for the sake of the kingdom of God. He died peacefully about the year 820 A.D. Following his death, St. Joseph buried him with honors next to the grave of St. Gregory.

2. HOLY MARTYR JOHN THE NEW OF IOANNINA

John was born in Ioannina, once the capitol city of the Emperor Pyrrhus. When his impoverished parents died, the young John moved to Constantinople and there continued his occupation, for he was a craftsman. Not long before that, the Turks surrounded Constantinople and many Christians, out of fear, denied Christ and embraced the Islamic faith. St. John had his workshop in the midst of these converts to Islam. The more the young John burned with love for Christ the Lord, the more openly he exposed himself as a Christian before these traitors of Christ. He began to argue with them about faith and, finally, rebuked them for their betrayal of Christ. They dragged him before the judge and falsely accused John, alleging that he had earlier embraced Islam, and that he again reverted to Christianity. After he was tortured and beaten with rods and iron ramrods, they cast him into prison. The next day was the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ and, again, they brought him out for further torture and John emerged singing: "Christ is risen from the dead!" To his torturers, he bravely said: "Do what you want in order to send me as soon as possible from this transient life to eternal life. I am Christ's slave, I follow Christ, for Christ I die that I may live with Him!" After that, John was bound in chains and brought to the place of burning. Upon seeing a large fire prepared for him, John ran and leaped into the flames. His torturers seeing how he loved death in the fire removed him from the fire and sentenced him to be beheaded. After they beheaded him, they threw his head and body into the fire. Later on, Christians leafed through the ashes and gathered some of the remains of his honorable and wonder-working relics and interred them in the Great Church [Agia Sophia - Church of the Holy Wisdom] in Constantinople. Thus, St. John of Ioannina died a martyr's death and received the glorious martyr's wreath on April 18, 1526 A. D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS VICTOR, ZOTICUS, ZENO, ACYNDIUS AND SEVERIAN

All five were martyred during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. They were pagans until they witnessed the sufferings of St. George the Great Martyr. While witnessing the sufferings and bravery of this glorious martyr and the many miracles, which were manifested, they embraced the Christian Faith for which, in a short while, they too suffered and were crowned with glory.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR JOHN THE NEW

John the Artisan, of honest craft,
His soul was as bright as a lump of gold,
By the teaching of Christ, wonderfully illumined,
And he prays to God: to wed him with suffering,
Oh Victorious Christ, Who for me was crucified,
From sinful darkness, cleanse me by suffering!
The shameful glory of a traitor, Oh do not give me,
But wed me with the sufferings of Your sufferers.
Prepare me for sufferings with Your Holy Spirit,
And allow sufferings and, to me direct them,
And You, Mother of God, of infinite mercy
Who, under the Honorable Cross of Your Son stood,
Pray for me at the time of my sufferings,
That, as an impregnable wall, I be firm.
Even you, O holy apostles, have mercy,
That the devil of the human race not prevail against me
Martyrs holy, my rejoicing,
Into your ranks, receive me also!
And now, torturers; traitors of God -
Yours is the sword and fire - here is my body!

REFLECTION

In one of the writings of the martyrdom of Christians during the reign of the Persian Emperor Sapor, it is said: "The swords became dull, the sword-bearers fell and the sword-makers fatigued, but the Cross is uplifted even higher and glistened from the blood of Christ's martyrs." How many and how many times did the persecutors of Christians complacently think that they were through with Christianity forever? In essence, their lives have ended while Christianity has always regenerated itself and blossomed anew. Nevertheless, even in addition to that experience, some of our contemporaries think, that the Christian Faith can be uprooted by force. But, they do not say by what means. They forget that all those means have been tried and all without success. With reason Tertullian cried out to the pagans: "In vain do you spill our blood. For the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How His resurrection brought unspeakable joy to those who loved Him;
2. How His resurrection brought unspeakable bitterness to those who hated Him;
3. How His last coming [Second Advent] into the world in glory and power will provoke among various people, various feelings; either joy or bitterness.

HOMILY

-About the testimony of reliable witnesses-

"But we have been eyewitnesses of His mighty glory" (2 Peter 1:16).

When the apostles speak about the glorious resurrection of the Lord, they speak in plurality. For each one of them gives his testimony and the testimony of other companions. Thus, the Apostle Peter writes: **"We do not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).**

Nathaniel did not want to believe only by hearing. That is why the Apostle Philip invited Nathaniel to **"Come and see!" (St. John 1:46)**. Nathaniel came, saw and believed. So it was with the other apostles, until they approached Christ, until they heard, and until they saw, they did not want to believe. Cleverly devised myths did not attract the apostles. Their healthy natural thoughts sought visual facts and not myths.

O my brethren, our Faith is well established and proved. The trail of God is well blazoned in the world. No one has need to doubt. Christ's resurrection is well witnessed. No one need to despair. Doubt and despair are two worms that are born of fly larva of sin. He who does not sin, clearly sees the blazoned trail of God in the world and clearly recognizes the resurrection of Christ.

O resurrected Lord, strengthen us by the power of Your Holy Spirit so that we sin no more and that we do not become blinded to Your trail in the world and to Your glorious resurrection.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 19 -

1. THE VENERABLE JOHN OF THE OLD CAVES

John lived a life of asceticism in the so-called "old caves," the "old Lavra" of Chariton the Great in Palestine. Having loved Christ the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind, John, at an early age, began to travel to the holy places and to listen to the instructions and counsels of the holy men. Finally, he settled in the Caves of Chariton, where he gave himself to rigorous asceticism spending days and years in fasting, prayer, vigils, continuously meditating on death, and teaching himself humility. As a good ripened fruit, he was plucked by death and took up habitation in Paradise. He lived and died in the eighth century.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS CHRISTOPHER, THEONAS AND ANTONIUS

Christopher, Theonas and Antonius were young officers serving under Emperor Diocletian. When St. George the Great Martyr was being tortured, they witnessed his sufferings as well as the miracles which occurred at that time. Seeing all of this, they came before the emperor, laid down their arms, removed their military belts and bravely confessed the Name of the Lord Jesus. For that, they were subjected to great torture and finally were tossed into the fire, where their bodies were consumed while their souls went to God into eternal joy. They honorably suffered in Nicomedia in the year 303 A.D.

3. SAINT TRYPHUN, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

The Emperor Romanus, who reigned over Byzantium at the beginning of the tenth century had a son, Theophylact, who was sixteen years old when Patriarch Stephen died. The emperor wanted his son to be elevated as patriarch for he had promised him [his son] this spiritual calling from his youth. Because his son was a minor, the emperor was ashamed to do this. The patriarchal throne was assumed by Tryphun a simple but chaste and pious old man. Tryphun remained on the throne for three years. When the son of the emperor reached his twentieth year, the emperor thought, to remove Tryphun at any price and to install his son as patriarch. The saint of God, Tryphun, did not want to relinquish his throne voluntarily, for no other reason, because he considered it to be a great scandal that such a young man be elevated to such a responsible and burdensome position as that of being patriarch. Through the intrigue of a nefarious bishop, the signature of the innocent Tryphun was extracted on a blank sheet of paper. Later on, in the imperial court, above that signature, the alleged resignation of the patriarch was written which the emperor decreed. As a result of this, there arose a great confusion in the Church, for the laity and the clergy stood by Tryphun, the godly man. The emperor then forcibly removed the aged patriarch and sent him to a monastery and, his son, Theophylact, was elevated as patriarch. St. Tryphun lived as an ascetic in this monastery for two years and five months and presented himself before the Lord in the year 933 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE MARTYR AGATHANGELUS

Agathangelus was from Thrace. His secular name was Athanasius. Serving the Turks, he was forcibly converted to Islam in Smyrna. As a penitent, he was tonsured a monk on the Holy Mountain [Athos] in the Monastery of Esfigmenu. Tortured by his conscience, he desired to wash away his sin with his own blood. He departed for Smyrna where he exhibited a cross and an icon of the resurrection of Christ before the Turks. He was beheaded on April 19, 1819 in his nineteenth year. Following his death, he appeared alive to Herman, his spiritual father.

5. VENERABLE SIMEON THE DISCALCED (BAREFOOTED ONE)

Simeon lived a life of asceticism on the Holy Mountain [Athos] and, for a short while, was the abbot of the Monastery Philotheu. He strengthened Christians in the Faith in many areas of the Balkans and was glorified by his miracle-working. He walked barefooted for which he is called, the Discalced (The Barefooted One). He died in Constantinople.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TRYPHUN

Innocent Tryphun, grey-haired shepherd,
Obtained the unfading wreath, through innocence.
The emperor wrongfully wanted for the sake of empty vanity
Not fearing God or God's punishment.
To be patriarch is an honor before men
But a burden before God and before angels;
A lad can tend the speechless flock [sheep]
But where is his wisdom for the flock [sheep]?
Kind-hearted Tryphun, the justice of God He protects
"That cannot be," to the emperor he said: "can never be!"
Give, to a mature man, wiser than I,
Who will steer the Ship of God through the rocks?
And not a child, even though your son, he be
Who, the Ship of God, against the rocks would smash!
Emperor Roman himself did as he wished,
Saint Tryphun and the people he saddened.
And, the eye of God throughout the world roams
Looking where there should be a wreath; where revenge.

REFLECTION

An elder spiritual father said: "Getting up in the morning, say to yourself: body, work in order to feed yourself; soul, be vigilant in order to save yourself and inherit the Kingdom!" These are not empty words, but this was the rule of many thousands of monks throughout the centuries: their daily Rule of Life. By labors, they fed themselves, through prayer they remained vigilant. Why only for monks? Cannot this be the Rule of every follower of Christ? Did not Christ Himself give us an obvious example of that, i.e., an example of physical effort and constant vigilance in prayer?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He, in His glorified body, was close to His disciples;

Close to them who sought Him (Mary Magdalene in the Garden);

Close to those who are in fear (The disciples in a closed room);

Close to those who are hungry (Those on the shore of the lake);

2. How He is close, even now, to everyone of us who seek Him, who is in fear and who is hungry?

HOMILY

-About being cautious toward all that is not according to Christ-

"Brethren, see to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

Brethren, do not let philosophy enslave us, which by conjecture, says that there is no eternal life nor resurrection from the dead. For we do not arrive at the Truth through the conjecture of man, but by God's revelation. That which we know about the truth we know from Truth Itself which was revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ and which was communicated to us through the faithful and wise witnesses of the Truth: the apostles and the saints. If we, because of our sins, were to reject these witnesses and accept the conjecture of humans, we will fall into the dark and bitter slavery of nature, of the body, to sin and to death.

Brethren, let us not be deceived by the empty myths of men, from men and according to men as though another world does not exist or if another world does exist, we, so to speak, do not know anything about it. Behold, we know with confidence that another world does exist. We know this not from conjecturers or deceivers but from the Lord Jesus Himself Who, on Mount Tabor, appeared to His disciples with Moses and Elijah who long ago departed this world and Who Himself, appeared to many of His followers after His death. We also know about this from the apostles, saints and numerous discerners to whom, because of their chastity and sanctity, God revealed the ultimate Truth about the other world. If, because of our sins, we do not believe these holy and the truthful witnesses, we will then have to believe those unholy and false men and we will be slaves to darkness, sin and death.

Brethren, let us not be led astray by worldly teaching, which examines animals, plants and stones and say it has not found God among these things and, from that, arrogantly attest that there is no God. Behold, we know that the Creator cannot be, as a thing among things, rather He is above all things and different from all things. We know this, as much by spiritual understanding and conscience, as well as by the obvious revelation of the Lord Jesus Himself, Who appeared in the body of a man as the Lord of all created things, as well as through the witness of the apostles, many other saints and discerning men.

Rather, let us glorify the Lord Jesus resurrected from the dead.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE THEODORE TRIHINOS

Theodore was a citizen of Constantinople and the son of wealthy parents. As a young man he left his parent's home and riches and entered a hermetical monastery in Thrace. Here, he imposed upon himself a most rigorous life of mortification. He slept on stones in order to sleep less. He traveled everywhere bareheaded and clothed himself in one garment made of "goat's hair," for which he was called Trihinos [Greek] Kostret [Serbian] for goat's hair. Because of his great self-mortification for the sake of the salvation of his soul, God bestowed upon him the great gift of miracle-working both during his lifetime and after death. He died peacefully about the year 400 A.D. His body was shown to be flowing with oil [Chrism].

2. THE VENERABLE ANASTASIUS OF MOUNT SINAI

Anastasius was the abbot of Mt. Sinai. In the beginning he was a monk for an extended period of time under the glorious Abbot John of the Ladder. After John's death, he then became abbot. Besides being a great ascetic, Anastasius was an eloquent author of the lives of the saints as well as instructional writings. He led a bitter struggle against the heretics, the so called Acephalites [Akefalita - Headless Ones], who denied the decisions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council [Chalcedon, 451 A.D.]. He died in an old age in the year 685 A.D. and took up habitation with the Lord Whom he faithfully served.

3. BLESSED ANASTASIUS SINAITES, PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH

While a monk on Mt. Sinai, Anastasius was elected patriarch of Antioch during the reign of Emperor Justinian. He was elevated to this rank by virtue of his charity, chaste life, great spiritual learning and a staunch faith. The Emperor Justinian fell into the heresy of Docetism [this heresy taught that Christ's sufferings were apparent and not real], which Eutychius the Patriarch of Constantinople and this Blessed Anastasius sharply rebelled against. The emperor banished Eutychius and also wanted to banish Anastasius but he was unable to find any reproach in his life. However, when Justinian died, repenting beforehand and re-instating Eutychius to the throne, then his successor Justin succeeded in banishing Anastasius on the basis of some spurious calumnies. Anastasius remained in exile for twenty-three years and was re-instated to the throne of Antioch during the reign of Maurice. He governed the Church of God for six years and ended his earthly sojourn in the year 599 A.D.

4. BLESSED GREGORY, PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH

Gregory was an Armenian by birth. He was abbot of the Pharanite Monastery below Mt. Sinai. When Blessed Anastasius was banished from his throne Gregory, against his will, was installed as patriarch of Antioch. Blessed Patriarch Sophronius also writes very favorably about him in his "Spiritual Meadow." Gregory was especially distinguished by his very great compassion, especially toward sinners. He died in the Lord in the year 593 A.D.

5. THE HOLY APOSTLE ZACCHAEUS

At first, Zacchaeus was a tax collector and a sinner. When our Lord saw him in Jericho in a tree and entered his home, Zacchaeus was brought to repentance. **"He (Jesus) came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed the sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, Who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him: `Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.' And he came down quickly and received Him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, `He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.' But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, `Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, ` today salvation has come to this house because this man is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost" (St. Luke 19: 1-10).** Later on, Zacchaeus followed the Apostle Peter who appointed him bishop of Caesarea in Palestine where he faithfully served the Gospel and died peacefully.(*)

6. THE VENERABLE ATHANASIUS OF METEORA

Athanasius was born in 1310 A.D. He lived the ascetical life on Athos, the Holy Mountain. He founded the famous Meteora Monastery in Thessaly. He possessed the great "gift of discernment" and miracle-working.

(*) Philaret mentions Gabriel the Child in his Lives of the Saints, which a certain Jew, Schutko, lured to an isolated place and there crucified him. Gabriel was born in the village Zvjerk near the town of Zabludov. He was only six years old. His parents, Peter and Anastasia Gavdjev, were absent from home that day. After thirty years, Gabriel's body was discovered incorrupt. He suffered in the year 1684 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ANASTASIUS

Anastasius, the God-bearing father,
Upon himself assumed prayerful labor and fasting,
Mortification he maintained, long and persistent,
Until, with the spirit, he learned the mysteries.
Then, his honey-mouth he opened:
Christ is, says he, the rock of salvation.
Do not insanely say: He was a long time ago,
Where is He now in order to speak to me?
The Good News, his Covenant Holy,
Who is able to resist it?
It speaks to you in place of Christ Himself,
That is His All-Pure Mouth!
Again, you speak: I desire to see Him!
Look with your whole mind and heart
At Holy Communion, from wine and bread,
There, in the flesh is He; what else do you need?
Repent, O brother, repent of your sins,
A thousand deaths around you stand!
To your spiritual father, your sins confess,
After that, drink His Blood and eat His Body.
Only repent. If you begin with repentance
You will live with justice and shining hope.
Repent, O brother, repent of your sins,
A thousand deaths, around you stand!

REFLECTION

St. Anastasius of Sinai teaches: "To every Christian is given an angel [Guardian Angel] from God to guard him all his life unless someone through evil deeds drives him away. But as the snake drives away bees and evil smell drives away pigeons, thus our sins drive away the guardian angel of our life: drunkenness, adultery, anger and so forth. The angel of every faithful man leads him to every good deed, while the demons exert to scandalize the faithful ones and to deprive them of the Kingdom of Heaven." The angels are close to men and that they take care of men, the whole of Holy Scripture attests to this, but especially the New Testament. Besides this, there exists in the Orthodox Church numerous traditions of saintly men and women, who witness to that which St. Athanasius confirms, i.e. that is that each one of us in this world is accompanied by a gentle and mighty [herald] messenger of God, a soldier of the King of Heaven, the angel of light. Who, except an insane person drives a good friend away from himself? In truth, only the insane and the extremely ignorant, drive away their best friend, their guardian angel by their sins.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He, as the Almighty Victor over death, does not seek revenge on His enemies who tortured and crucified Him, but leaving them to themselves, He sustains His frightened friends;
2. How He even today as in all times, innocent and meek, does not hurry to seek revenge on the unfaithful but hurries to the aid of the faithful.

HOMILY

-About the one and only foundation of salvation-

"For no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The Jews say, " the foundation is Moses." The Muslims say, " the foundation is Mohammed." The short-sighted naturalists say, " the foundation is nature." We ask: Did Moses resurrect from the dead? Did Mohammed ascend into heaven? Does nature bestow the Holy Spirit the Comforter? Moses did not resurrect. Mohammed did not ascend into heaven. Nature, not only does not bestow the Holy Spirit the Comforter to men, but breathes hatred against man and growls at him and bares its talons.

One cannot be the foundation of the world who is conceived in sin; who himself sinned; who wandered and sought counsel in women; who, by someone else's power, performed certain works; who crumbled in the grave and whose name leads to confusion in regard to the way, the truth and the life. Mohammed and Moses were conceived in sin and they committed sins; they sought counsel from women; with the power of others they performed deeds; in the grave they lay decomposed; their names lead men to confusion about the way, the truth and the life.

That is why, brethren, we have no where to turn in history and to seek another such foundation except the Lord Jesus Christ Who was conceived without sin; Who did not commit any sin; Who did not wander and Who did not seek counsel from anyone; Who by His own power performed mighty deeds; Who did not decay in the grave; and Whose Name does not lead men into confusion regarding the way, the truth and the life.

The apostle does not say that Christ laid down some foundation but that He Himself is that established foundation. He is All-justice, that is why He is the foundation of every justice. He is All-truth, that is why He is the foundation of every truth. He is All-wisdom, that is why He is the foundation of every wisdom. He is All-power, that is why He is the foundation of every power. He is All-good, that is why He is the foundation of every good. He is All-life, that is why He is the foundation of life in both worlds, in this and in the next. O resurrected Lord, You are the foundation of our salvation and eternal life.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR JANUARIUS AND OTHERS WITH HIM

This saint was the bishop of Benevento in Italy. At the time of persecution under Maximian, Januarius was brought before the court and tortured in various ways, which he blamelessly and patiently endured. When they cast him into the fire, the fire was cooled by an invisible dew and the martyr stood unharmed amidst the flames and sang praises to God. Then they scrapped his body with iron brushes until the bones shown white, which the martyr innocently and patiently endured. His Deacon Festus and Lector Desiderius witnessed the suffering of the martyr and wept for their spiritual father. Then they bound both of them and together with Bishop Januarius brought them to the city of Puteoli [near Naples] and cast them into prison. In this same prison for the sake of Christ, were Sussos, Deacon of Miseno and Proculus, Deacon of Puzzuoli and two Christian laymen Euticius and Acutius. The next day all seven of them were thrown before the wild beasts. The wild beasts did not touch them. They were all beheaded and the Christians of the city of Naples secretly carried away to their city the body of St. Januarius and buried it honorably in church. To the present day numerous miracles have occurred at the grave of this saint. Among the many miracles one is particularly remembered i.e., a poor widow whose only son had died removed the icon of St. Januarius from the church and placed it on the body of her dead son, sobbing and praying to the saint. Her son became alive. St. Januarius honorably suffered in the year 305 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR THEODORE AND OTHERS WITH HIM

Theodore suffered for the Faith of Christ in Perga of Pamphylia during the reign of Antonius. Theodore was young and of handsome countenance. When the governor of that province chose him, along with other young men, who were to be sent to the imperial court for service, Theodore objected and declared that he is a Christian. Because of that, he underwent many kinds of tortures and was then tossed into the fire. But, water bubbled out of the ground and quenched the fire. The governor attributed this to some magic of Theodore. But, the martyr said: "This is not the work of my power but Christ my God. If you want to know the power of your gods, light another fire and toss in one of your soldiers and then I hope you will see their power and the Almighty power of my God." Indeed, the governor wanted to cast one of his soldiers into the fire but they, out of fear, implored him to throw in their place Dioscorus, the pagan priest. The pagan priest Dioscorus then begged the governor to throw in the idol of Zeus and the other idols and, if they are gods, they will easily save themselves. Dioscorus said this because he had turned to Christ in his heart since he saw the miracle that took place with St. Theodore. Learning of this, the governor sentenced Dioscorus to death by burning; also delivered over to death by the governor were Theodore and the two soldiers, Socrates and Dionysius and Theodore's mother, Philippa. Theodore was crucified on a cross on which he expired on the third day. Socrates and Dionysius were pierced with a spear and Philippa was beheaded. All were crowned with the wreaths of glory in the Kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THEODORE THE MARTYR

I serve one King and another I cannot,
I serve the Living Christ, Lord and God!
Thus said Theodore to the Roman governor,
The governor looked upon him as upon a beautiful picture,
And, at first, began to dissuade him quietly
But all dissuasions remained to no avail
In a fiery furnace, with companions two,
Theodore's mouth, all filled with Psalms.
God, with a cold dew, over the terrible fire, poured
In the midst of the fire, Theodore, to his Lord prays,
That, before his death, his mother once more to see.
According to Your mercy O God, do this for me!
And the mother [Philippa] in the furnace, appeared to her son,
To one another said what had to be said.
Philippa, the aged mother the governor summons,
The aged one obediently responded to him
I called you, said he, to counsel your son
To openly deny the Nazarene,
And to acknowledge the gods of the Roman Empire
If you wish that your son not die.
And Philippa said: before I gave birth to him
I prayed to God: Lord, have mercy!
And a reply I received, that I will live
To see my son crucified for Christ.
And now, that is why toward death I am indifferent
For the death of the both of us, to God I am grateful.

REFLECTION

"Guard your heart!" These words were spoken in the past by experienced ascetics. Father John of Kronstadt says the same thing in our days: "The heart is refined, spiritual and heavenly by nature; guard it. Do not overburden it, do not make it earthly; be temperate to the utmost in food and drink and, in general, in bodily pleasures. The heart is the temple of God. **'If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person' (1 Corinthians 3:17).**" Spiritual experience in ancient times and spiritual experience in our time is identical, under the condition that the confession of faith is identical. Heavenly knowledge, to which the ascetics of old arrived, does not differ from the heavenly knowledge to which the ascetics of today arrive. For as Christ is the same today and tomorrow so it is the same with human nature. What is important: the human heart is the same; his thirst, and his hunger, is the same; and nothing is able to satisfy him but the glory, power and riches of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How when He appears to the apostles, He appears to all of us;
2. How His resurrection is the proof of eternal life and announcement of eternal life to all of mankind.

HOMILY

-About Christ in the hearts of the faithful-

"And that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17).

That person does not have Christ who only has Him on his tongue. Neither does that person have Christ who has Him only on paper. Neither does that person have Christ who has Him only on the wall. Neither does that person have Christ that has Him in the museum of the past. That person, in truth, has Christ who has Him in his heart. For Christ is Love and the throne of love is the heart.

If Christ is in your heart then, for you, He is God. If He is only on your tongue, or on paper or on a wall, or in the museum of the past and even though you call Him God, for you, He is but a toy. Beware then, O man, for no one can play around with God without punishment.

The heart apparently is a narrow organ, but God can dwell in it. When God dwells in it, then it is filled and overly filled and nothing else can position itself in it. If, however, the whole world were to settle in it, it remains empty without God.

Brethren, let Christ, the resurrected and living Lord, pour faith into your hearts and your hearts will be filled and overly filled. He cannot enter and dwell into your hearts except through your faith. If you do not possess faith, Christ will remain only on your tongue or on your paper or on your wall or in the museum of the past. What kind of benefit do you have from that? What kind of benefit do you have to hold life on your tongue and death in your heart? For, if you hold the world in your heart and Christ on your tongue, you hold death in your heart and life on your tongue. Water on the tongue of the thirsty does not help. Lower the living Christ into your heart and you will be permeated with the truth and you will sense unspeakable sweetness.

O resurrected Lord, cleanse our hearts from the deadly guests who dwell in it and You Yourself take up dwelling in it, that we may live and glorify You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE THEODORE OF SYKEON

Theodore was born in the village of Sykeon in Galatia for which he was surnamed, the Sykeote. As a child of ten years, he surrendered himself to strict fasting and in all-night vigils after the model of Stephen, an elder who lived in his house. His mother Maria was a wealthy widow and intended to dedicate her son to the military profession. St. George appeared to her in a dream and informed her that Theodore was destined for the service of the King of Heaven and not a king of the earth. St. George appeared to Theodore many times either to instruct him or to save him from certain dangers in which the evil demons placed him. He had several visions of the All-Holy Mother of God. Theodore's life of mortification, by his ascetical severity, surpassed the living ascetics of his time. He mortified his body through hunger, thirst, iron chains and by standing at prayer all night. He did all of this in order to bind his soul with love for God and to make his soul the complete master over his body. In response to Theodore's love, the merciful Lord responded with love. God bestowed upon him great power over evil spirits and over all diseases and afflictions of mankind. He was famous throughout as a wonder-working healer. Because of his purity and devotion, he was consecrated bishop of Anastasiopolis against his will. He remained for eleven years at his episcopal duty and then implored God to free him from this service in order to, again, dedicate himself to his beloved asceticism. After that, he returned to his monastery where, in his old age, he rendered his soul to his Lord, for Whom he willingly suffered much. He died at the beginning of the reign of Emperor Heraclius about the year 613 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR LEONIDES

Leonides was the father of Origen. He suffered for Christ in Alexandria in the year 202 A.D. He was condemned to death by an edict of the emperor but, before that, all of his property was confiscated. Origen wrote to his father in prison: "Father, do not concern yourself over us and do not avoid martyrdom because of us," i.e., because of his children.

3. THE VENERABLE MONK VITALIS

During the time of the Alexandrian Patriarch John the Merciful, a young monk appeared who, as soon as he arrived, compiled a list of all the prostitutes in Alexandria. The mortification (asceticism) of this young monk was exceptional and unique. During the day he would offer himself for hire to do the most difficult jobs and at night, he would enter the houses of ill repute, gave the earned amount of money to some prostitute and close himself in the room with her the entire night. As soon as they were locked up, Vitalis would beg the woman to lie down and sleep and he would spend the entire night in a corner of the room in prayer to God for that sinner. Thus, he would save the woman from sinning at least one night. The second night, he would go to a second, the third night to a third and so on until he had visited them all, and then, he again returned to the one with whom he started. By his counseling, many of the sinners abandoned their sullied trade. Some of them married, others entered convents and still others turned to a respectable work and income. Vitalis forbid all of these women to reveal the reason why he was visiting them. Because of this, Vitalis became a scandal for all of Alexandria. The men began to scold him, spit upon him and to openly beat him on the streets. He bore all patiently, making known his good works to God and concealing them from men. When he died, everything about him became known. Many miracles of healing occurred over his grave. People from different places began to bring their sick to his grave. Spat upon by men, he was and remained glorified by the Omniscient God.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT VITALIS

Vitalis, a monk, in a city large
With prayer in his heart, hurries to his labor,
And the sinful populace pretends to be just,
And scorn the monk and upon his head spat.
The monk wipes his face, endures and remains silent,
Does not respond, neither at anyone, become angry
Then, a certain young man and an aged pervert
Approached Vitalis and struck him.
And the young man, to him, said: shameless monk
How long will you torment our patience?
"Why did you strike me?," Vitalis said,
You will be struck - so that the entire city will assemble
And much time did not pass and the young man went insane
That, he judged the man of God without God.
And the youth howled; the entire city became frightened,
Vitalis, peacefully presented himself to God
Then, to the grave of the saint, the insane one came
And at the grave, for himself, found healing.
And the young man related the most recent tale
And to glorious Vitalis, he gave thanks.

REFLECTION

At the time of the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325 A.D.], the quarreling clerics wrote accusations one against the other and presented them to the emperor. Emperor Constantine received all of these accusations and not opening them, burned them over a flaming candle. To the amazement of those around him, the emperor said: "If I would see with my own eyes a bishop, a priest or a monk in a sinful act, I would cover him with my cloak, so that no one would ever see his sin." Thus, this great Christian emperor embarrassed the scandalmongers and sealed their mouths. Our Faith prohibits us to be spies of the sins of others and stresses that we be merciless judges of our own sins. The sick person in the hospital is concerned with his own particular malady so that he has neither the will nor the time to question others who are ill or to mock their illness. Are we not all in this world as patients in a hospital? Does not our own common sense underline that we look at our own illness and not at another's illness? Let no one think that they will be cured of their illness in the other world. This world is merely a hospital and a place for healing and, in that world, there is no hospital; there is only a mansion or only a prison.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How by His resurrection, He justified the faith and hope of mankind in immortality;
2. How by His resurrection, He destroyed the fear of death in the faithful.

HOMILY

-About the power of God in the weakness of men-

"For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

There are no contradictions in Holy Scripture and even in these words there are no contradictions even though they sound like it. The physical is governed by sound and the spiritual by thought. For physical man, there are contradictions everywhere for he is afraid of obstacles and flees from a shadow if this shadow seems to be an obstacle for him. The spiritual man is like a knight who likes to overcome obstacles. For the spiritual man, hidden in these words of Scripture, is the entire teaching about salvation.

"For when I am weak, then I am strong." That is, when I am cognizant of my nothingness and the omnipotence of God, then I am strong. When I know that I, of myself alone, cannot do any good neither for myself nor for others and when I totally entrust myself in the power and mercy of God, then I am strong. When I sense that I am as a drowning person in this world and that I am not in the position to grab on to the extended hand of God, to hold on to it by my own strength, rather cry out to God that He with His hand grab hold of my hand and pull me out of the depths of sinful abyss, then I am strong. When I see that I am weak and that I am a hollow reed amidst the tempest of winds and floods; a reed which God is able to fill with His Almighty Grace and when I pray with faith for God's Grace, then I am strong.

O, my weak brethren, let us entrust ourselves to the power of God that we, in our nothingness, may be strong. Relying on man you are weak but relying on God you are strong. Adhere to God and all the power of God will be with you. Confess your weaknesses before God and God will send you His All-powerful Grace. This is confirmed for you by the apostle through his example and through his experience: **"For when I am weak, then I am strong."** In truth there is no contradiction in the Holy Scripture. Physical man speaks about contradiction in terms of the sound of the word, but spiritual man enters into the meaning and shatters the illusion of contradiction through experience.

O resurrected Lord, have mercy on our weakness and fill us with Your Omnipotent Grace.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT GEORGE, THE HOLY AND GREAT MARTYR

This glorious and victorious saint was born in Cappadocia the son of wealthy and virtuous parents. His father suffered for Christ and his mother then moved to Palestine. When George grew up, he entered the military, where in his twentieth year, attained the rank of a Tribune and as such was in the service of the Emperor Diocletian. When Diocletian began the terrible persecution against Christians, George came before him and courageously confessed that he is a Christian. The emperor had him thrown into prison and ordered that his feet be placed in a stockade of wooden hobbles and that a heavy stone be placed on his chest. After that, the emperor commanded that George be tied to a wheel under which was a board with large nails and he was to be rotated until his entire body became as one bloody wound. After that, they buried him in a pit with only his head showing above the ground and there they left him for three days and three nights. Then George was given a deadly poison to drink by some magician. But, through all of these sufferings, George continuously prayed to God and God healed him instantly and saved him from death to the great astonishment of the people. When he resurrected a dead man through his prayer, many then accepted the Faith of Christ. Among these also was Alexandra, the wife of the Emperor Athanasius, the chief pagan priest and the farmers: Glycerius, Valerius, Donatus and Therinus. Finally the emperor ordered George and his wife Alexandra beheaded. Blessed Alexandra died on the scaffold before being beheaded. St. George was beheaded in the year 303 A.D. The miracles which have occurred over the grave of St. George are without number. Numerous are his appearances, either in dreams or openly, to those who have invoked him and implored his help from that time until today. Enflamed with love for Christ the Lord, it was not difficult for this saintly George to leave all for the sake of this love: rank, wealth, imperial honor, his friends and the entire world. For this love, the Lord rewarded him with the wealth of unfading glory in heaven and on earth and eternal life in His kingdom. In addition, the Lord bestowed upon him the power and authority to assist all those in miseries and difficulties who honor him and call upon his name.

2. THE HOLY NEO-MARTYR LAZARUS

This neo-martyr Lazarus was a Bulgarian by birth from Gabrovo. As a young man he left the place of his birth and went to Anatolia. Lazarus tended sheep in the village of Soma. As a Christian, Lazarus provoked the wrath of the Turks against himself and was cast into prison by a certain Aga. After prolonged tortures from inhuman tormentors, which Lazarus heroically endured out of love for Christ, this young martyr was killed on April 23, 1802, in his twenty-eighth year. The Lord received him into His eternal courts and glorified him in heaven and on earth. Countless miracles have occurred over the relics of St. Lazarus.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT GEORGE THE GREAT MARTYR

Saint George on a tall horse
Saved the maiden from the dragon,
On his lance, the sign of the Cross,
Holy weapon, invincible,
With that weapon, the dragon he slayed,
The spared maiden, to the father he returned,
With his goodness, he indebted God Himself
With a wreath of glory, God repaid him.
Saint George with a hero's heart,
All wealth, he distributed to the poor,
Rejected the honor and glory of the world
For the sake of the Name of Christ, the Victor,
Sufferings he embraced; sufferings willingly,
His body crushed for the salvation of the soul,
With his goodness, he indebted God Himself,
With a wreath of glory, God repaid him.
George, the Saint and Victor-bearer
Even now walks with the cross on his lance,
Justice he defends, injustice he punishes,
Whoever invokes him with faith and tears,
Whoever prays to him with a repenting soul,
George, the Saint flies to his aid.
With his goodness, he indebted God Himself,
With a wreath of glory, God repaid him

REFLECTION

During a certain uprising in Constantinople during the reign of Emperor Constantine, some embittered men broke off the nose and ears of the statue of the emperor in the city. Many adulators quickly came to the emperor and with great disgust relayed to the emperor how rebels broke the nose and ears from his statues and they asked the emperor to punish the transgressors with the most severe punishment. The great emperor felt his nose and ears with his hands and said to the flatterers: "I feel that my nose and ears are whole and undamaged!" The flatterers were ashamed and withdrew. With every royal generosity we all need to endure insults from others. Yet, with particular caution listen to accusations against other people, which our flatterers bring to us. We should always confess before God and before ourselves, that we, by our sins, deserved even greater insults than those which are perpetrated against us.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How His resurrection is the beginning of the new and bright day in the history of mankind;
2. How His resurrection is my peace, my strength and the resurrection of my soul while I am still in the body.

HOMILY

-About stirring up pure minds-

"This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; through them by way of reminder I am trying to stir up your sincere disposition" (2 St. Peter 3:1).

Do you see brethren, the goal with which the Apostle Peter writes in his epistle? To stir up in people their pure minds! The apostle considers this as the main thing. And truly, it is the main thing. For if in every man the dormant pure mind would be awakened, there would not be a single human soul left on earth who would not have believed in Christ the Lord; who would not have confessed Him as the crucified and resurrected Savior of the world; and who would not have contritely turned to repentance for sins committed by the inducement of an impure mind.

Nothing distances us more from the Good News [Gospel] than an impure mind. What makes the human mind of man impure? Sin makes the human mind impure as milk when you pour in poison; it all becomes poisonous, so the human mind when impure sin enters into it, it all becomes impure. Every sin is impure; every sin makes the mind of man impure, muddy and poisonous. All knowledge which an impure mind possesses is impure as a muddied and soiled image of an object in a muddied and soiled mirror. **"To the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15)**, said Paul, the other chief apostle. While Adam had a pure mind in Paradise, all of his knowledge about the Creator and created things was clear and true. Sin darkened his mind and the minds of his descendants. That paradisaical, pure mind of the sinless man is not dead rather is dormant in men under sin. It is necessary only to awaken it and then it will unerringly lead man back to Christ. That is why the apostle takes the responsibility to awaken in men that original pure, clear, discerning mind given to him by God.

O, my brethren, let us assist the holy apostle in awakening of men; He who was crucified upside down on the cross because of His preaching, let us help him in as much as it concerns us, and to awaken in every one of us, our own pure mind. If every one of us does this, we will see that all of us have one mind. For a pure mind is one while an impure mind is legion!

O resurrected Lord, You awaken in us a pure mind through the prayers of Your Holy Apostle Peter.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 24 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR SABAS THE SOLDIER [STRATELATES]

This glorious Sabas lived in Rome during the reign of Emperor Aurelian and held the rank of commander. By ancestry, he was of a Gothic tribe. He often visited Christians in prison and assisted them from his own estate. Because of his extreme chastity and fasting, God had given him authority over unclean spirits. When Sabas was accused of being a Christian, he courageously stood before the emperor, threw down his military belt and openly confessed Christ the Lord. Sabas was tortured in various ways: flogged, scrapped with irons and burned with candles. He did not succumb to these deadly tortures but appeared alive and healthy. His military companions, seeing that God was obviously helping him, embraced the Faith of Christ. Those seventy in number were immediately beheaded by order of the emperor. Christ the Lord Himself appeared in a great light to St. Sabas in prison and encouraged His martyr. After that, he was condemned to death by drowning. Sabas was thrown into a deep river where he gave up his soul to God in the year 272 A.D. His soul went to the Lord to Whom he remained faithful through many tortures.

2. THE VENERABLE ELIZABETH

In her early years, Elizabeth entered the monastic state in the Monastery of St. Cosmas and St. Damian in Constantinople and took upon herself the heavy burden of self-mortification for the sake of Christ the God and for the sake of her soul. She considered herself a bride of Christ and considered this world as though it did not exist. Out of her great love for God, emanated her great compassion toward people, especially toward the sick and the suffering. With the gift that God had bestowed upon her, she cured various diseases and afflictions of the people. During her nightly prayers, she was seen totally encompassed by a heavenly light. Following her death, her relics possessed the power of healing and a great number of the sick and suffering gathered at her grave throughout the ages. She died peacefully and entered into the eternal joy of her Lord in the year 540 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS EUSEBIUS, NEON, LEONTIUS AND LONGINUS

These four were military companions of St. George. Witnessing the courageous endurance and miracles of St. George, these wonderful soldiers became Christians for which they were beheaded.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR PASICRATES AND VALENTINE

When the judge urged Pasicrates and the martyr's brother Papianus, who had fallen away from Christ because of the fear of torture, to offer sacrifice to the idols, Pasicrates placed his hand in the fire and cried out: "The body is mortal and is consumed by fire but the soul is immortal and does not feel the visible sufferings!" However, his mother sustained and encouraged him to endure to the end. He was beheaded with Valentine and both took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ about the year 288 A.D.

5. VENERABLE THOMAS, "FOOL FOR CHRIST"

Whenever he was in the city of Antioch on business for the monastery, Thomas always pretended insanity for the sake of Christ. A certain Anastasius did not want to give him alms that Thomas sought for the monastery but struck him with his fist. Thomas then prophesied: "From now on neither will I receive anything from Anastasius, neither will Anastasius be able to give me anything." After a day, Anastasius died and Thomas, prior to his return to the monastery, also died. Thus the prophecy of this holy man was fulfilled. St. Thomas died in Daphni near Antioch at the time of Patriarch Domnus (546 - 560 A.D.).

6. THE NEO-MARTYRS LUKE AND NICHOLAS

This wonderful young man Luke, a tailor by trade, suffered martyrdom for Christ in 1564 A.D. Nicholas suffered martyrdom in the year 1776 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THOMAS THE DISCERNER

Saint Thomas pretends to be deranged
For the sake of Christ, his Savior,
And God, he glorifies in his heart,
The only One, the Creator of the world,
God's name is in his heart,
Have mercy upon me O Good God!
By this, he nourishes his soul:
Have mercy upon me O Good God!
Holy Thomas is not concerned
What the world about him will say,
Let the world rant, let it threaten,
The true judgment, God will pronounce.
Whoever pleased the world
Before God was found to be false,
And Thomas smiled
At the world which pretends to be important.
O you shadow, above the water,
Why do you pretend to be so important?
All reality is in the Lord
When yourself, you consider as nothing,
With that, you will glorify Him.

REFLECTION

In exhorting Christians to attend church for prayer, St. John Chrysostom says: "If someone delivers to subjugated citizens a royal decree, the citizens do not question the life of the messenger, as to whether he is rich or poor or righteous or sinful but all listen attentively to that which he is reading. If someone did not hear, he asks one who has heard. When you have such a great awe of earthly rulers, how much more should you have heed us priests here, where the Creator of the Heavenly Powers speaks through us sinners?" Indeed, what is Holy Scripture but a Grammata [Letter] of the Heavenly King! Why is it that the unique and saving Grammata does not interest us every day and every hour, when the least authority in the country and their trivial orders do interest us? St. Anthony said: "Whatever you do have justification for this in Holy Scripture." But how can you have justification in Holy Scripture if you are not familiar with Holy Scripture?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How His resurrection drives away from us every confusion, gloom and melancholy;
2. How His resurrection instills serenity, courage and goodwill into the souls of men.

HOMILY

-About the vanity of everything in comparison with Christ-

"I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8).

The apostle who writes this had worldly knowledge; he had wealth and friends, he had youth and health. He had all the requisites of worldly success among his people. Paul says, "I left all." For the sake of Christ Jesus my Lord, I left all. Before the sages of this world he became a fool; before the rich he became as a beggar; before his friends, he becomes an enemy. He exhausted his youth and health by voluntary sufferings and afflictions. With one stroke he closed for himself all prospects for worldly success. Why did you do this O Holy Apostle Paul? Because, "**I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ.**"

Brethren, did the Apostle Paul deceive himself leaving everything as rubbish and did he gain something greater in gaining Christ? Twenty centuries are witnessing that the holy apostle did not deceive himself and, that in gaining Christ, he received incomparably more and better than that which he abandoned and sacrificed. He received wisdom above all worldly knowledge and riches unperishable and incorruptible; he gained friends in the form of true angels of God; and eternal youth without disease and aging; and divine success, which lasts without change, in eternal life. All of this he gained in gaining Christ. All of this he received leaving all that the world offers to its favorites.

Indeed, brethren, Christ is better than the world. There are no words which could express His superiority over the world. The world deceives its favorites but Christ rewards His favorites truthfully. The world gives little and takes all. The world offers decay and takes away life. Christ, however, seeks little and gives all. He seeks that we discard decay and He gives us eternal life. Brethren, Christ is our one and only true friend.

O resurrected Lord Christ, help us to renounce rubbish, to renounce decay and grant us eternal life.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST MARK

Mark was a traveling companion and assistant to the Apostle Peter who, in his first epistle calls him his son, "**The chosen one at Babylon sends you his greeting as does Mark, my son**" (1 Peter 5:13), not according to the flesh but a son according to the spirit. While Mark was in Rome with Peter, the faithful begged him to write down for them the saving teaching of the Lord Jesus, His miracles and His life. Thus, Mark wrote the Holy Gospel which the Apostle Peter himself saw and attested to its truthfulness. Mark was appointed a bishop by the Apostle Peter and was sent to Egypt to preach. As so, St. Mark was the first preacher of the Good News [Gospel] in Egypt and was the first bishop in Egypt. Egypt was entirely oppressed by the thick darkness of paganism, idolatry, soothsaying and malice. With the help of God, St. Mark succeeded to sow the seed of the teaching of Christ throughout Libiya, Ammonicia and Pentopolis. From Pentopolis, St. Mark came to Alexandria where the Spirit of God led him. In Alexandria, he succeeded in establishing the Church of God and installed bishops, priests and deacons and to firmly strengthen them all in the honorable Faith. Mark confirmed his preaching through many and great miracles. When the heathens raised accusations against Mark, as a destroyer of their idolatrous faith, and when the mayor of the city began to search for Mark, he again fled to Pentopolis where he continued to strengthen his earlier work. After two years, Mark again returned to Alexandria to the great joy of all the faithful, whose number was greatly multiplied. On this occasion, the pagans seized Mark, bound him tightly and began to drag him over the cobblestone pavement crying out: "Let us drag the ox to the pen." Wounded and bloodied throughout, they cast Mark into prison where, at first, a heavenly angel appeared to him encouraging and strengthening him. After that, the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to him and said: "Peace be to you Mark, my Evangelist!" To that Mark replied: "Peace be to you also my Lord Jesus Christ!" The next day the vicious men brought Mark out of prison and again dragged him throughout the streets with the same cry: "Let us drag the ox to the pen." Completely exhausted and worn out, Mark uttered: "Into Your hands O Lord, I give up my spirit." Mark expired and his soul was translated into a better world. His holy relics were honorably buried by Christians and, through the centuries, his relics give healing to people from all of their afflictions, pains and diseases.

2. SAINT ANIANUS, THE SECOND BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

When Mark stepped out of the boat on dry land in Alexandria, the sandal on one foot became torn. Then, he saw a cobbler to whom he gave his sandal for repairs. In mending the sandal, the cobbler pierced himself with the needle in his left hand and blood began to flow and the cobbler screamed in pain. Then the apostle of God mixed some dust with his spittle and anointed the wounded hand and suddenly the hand became whole again. Astonished at this miracle, the cobbler invited Mark to his home. Hearing Mark's homily, Anianus [for that was the cobbler's name] was baptized; he and his entire household. Anianus displayed so much virtue and so much zeal for the work of God that St. Mark consecrated him bishop. This holy man was the second bishop of the Church in Alexandria.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST MARK

The Evangelist Mark, to Egypt he flew
As a bee with honey. And Egypt experienced
The sweetness of Christ's honey; the sweetness of living knowledge,
And the people began to be amazed at Christ:
How He, in His divine concern, became incarnated
How He, humbled Himself for man's salvation,
And how He resurrected in glory and power.
Through the thick darkness, until now, we walked!
The Egyptians said: "And now for us, the sun rises,"
Let us rejoice O people in this shiny day!
But his wonderful crop, Mark watered with his blood,
And because of that, all the idols collapsed.
And Egypt, the land of the pharaohs, was baptized
Became the field of God; the Apostolic Church.

REFLECTION

The devil quickly finds work for idle hands and an angel quickly finds work for diligent hands. In this world of constant movement and constant change man, whether he wants to or not, must always be busy, be it either good works or evil works. The idle man, actually is not lazy. He is a diligent worker of the devil. An idle body and an idle soul is the most suitable field for the devil's plowing and sowing. St. Anthony the Great said: "The body needs to be subdued and immersed in prolonged labors." St. Ephrem the Syrian teaches: "Teach yourself to work, so that you will not have to learn to beg." All of the other Holy Fathers, without exception, speak about the necessity of work for the salvation of the soul of man. The apostles and all the saints give to us an example of continuous and concentrated spiritual and physical labor. That the idle man, by his idleness, does not extend his life on earth but shortens it, is clearly shown by the longevity of many saints, the greatest laborers among the laborers in the world.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How His resurrection incites us and strengthens us for every good work; physical and spiritual;
2. How His resurrection enlightens our every good work with the light of hope in the Living God, Who counts our works, measures them and preserves them for the Day of Judgment.

HOMILY

-About the apostles' love for labors-

"Nor did we eat food received free from everyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked so as not to burden any of you" (2 Thessalonians 3:8).

First fulfill then teach. All the apostles and all of the saints of God adhered to this rule. Thus, the Apostle Paul, even before he spoke the command: **"If anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10)**, declares for himself and for his assistants in preaching that they did not eat anyone's bread for free, rather by effort and labor earned their bread. **"Night and day we worked!"** Behold the true laborers! Behold the honey-bearing bees of Christ! Daily and nightly toil: where is their time for sin? Daily and nightly toil: where is their room for sin? Daily and nightly toil: where can the devil weave his nest of passions? Daily and nightly toil: where is their cause for scandal?

In certain Egyptian and Palestinian monasteries, there lived about ten thousand monks. They all lived off the labor of their hands: from weaving beehives, baskets, door mats and from other types of handiwork. Daily and nightly toil and daily and nightly prayer. When a monk sold his beehives in town for a higher price than the price which the abbot designated, for that, the monk experienced punishment. For the ascetics it was not a matter of enrichment but only for the most essential nourishment and the simplest clothing. In this, the ascetics were and are the true followers of the great apostle.

O, my brethren, let us flee from slothfulness [idleness] as from a cave of wild beasts. If by some chance we fall into a cave of wild beasts, let us quickly flee from it, before the wild beasts totally seal off the entrance. The cave is the dwelling place where the slothful man seeks rest. The wild beasts are evil spirits who, in such a dwelling place, feel more at home there than near their king in Hades. O Lord, Who are wonderful in all the works of Your creation, awaken us from slothfulness and encourage us to nightly and daily labor by Your encouraging Holy Spirit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR BASIL, BISHOP OF AMASEA

Licinius, brother-in-law of Constantine to whose sister he was married, pretended to be a Christian before the great emperor. When he received authority from the emperor, to govern the entire east, he, at first secretly, and later openly, began to persecute Christians and to strengthen idolatry. His wife grieved much about this, but was unable to dissuade her husband from this shameful deed. Giving himself over to idolatry, Licinius also succumbed to infinite passions without restraint but, most of all to infidelity toward his wife. During the assault of these unclean passions, Licinius wanted to defile the virgin Glaphyra who was in the service of the Empress. Glaphyra complained to the empress and the empress secretly sent her away from the imperial court of Nicomedia to the Province of Pontus. The virgin Glaphyra arrived at the town of Amasea and there was cordially received by Bishop Basil and other Christians. Glaphyra was elated that God had saved her virginity and, concerning this, she wrote to the empress. The empress also rejoiced and forwarded money to the church in Amasea. However, a letter of Glaphyra which was directed to the empress, fell into the hands of the emperor's eunuch who showed it to Emperor Licinius. The emperor, learning where Glaphyra was staying, immediately ordered that she and the bishop be brought back to Nicomedia. In the meantime, Glaphyra died and the soldiers brought Basil back to Nicomedia, alone and bound. Following tortures and imprisonment this blessed man was beheaded and tossed into the sea in the year 322 A.D. Through a vision of an angel of God his clergy found his body near the town of Sinope. They removed his body with the aid of a fisherman's net and translated it to Amasea where they honorably buried it in the church which he, by his efforts, had built. The Emperor Constantine raised up an army against Licinius, defeated, captured him and banished him into exile to Gaul where he ended his god-hating life.

2. SAINT JOANNICIUS OF DEVICH

Joannicius was a Serb from Zeta. As a young man he was overwhelmed with love for Christ. He left his home and family and withdrew to the region of Ibar at the mouth of the Black river into a narrow cave in which, according to tradition, before him, St. Peter of Korish lived a life of asceticism. When his fame began to spread among the people, he fled to Drenica and hid in the thick forest of Devich. Here St. Joannicius spent years in solitude, in silence and in prayer. According to tradition, the Serbian Prince George Brankovich brought his mentally ill daughter to him whom the saint healed. Out of gratitude, George built a monastery on this spot, known today by the name of Devich. The holy and wonder-working relics of Joannicius repose in this monastery. In this monastery, more recently, the nun Euphemia, the famous and God-pleasing hermitess lived a life of asceticism in Devich. The nun Euphemia is better known in the area of Kosovo by the name: The Blessed Stojna. She died in the Lord in the year 1895 A.D.

3. SAINT STEPHEN THE BISHOP OF PERM

Stephen was a Russian by birth. From an early age he was devoted to prayer and pious thoughts. As a young man, Stephen went to Rostov where he was tonsured a monk in the monastery of St. Gregory the Theologian. Learning about the Land of Perm, completely overrun with the weeds of heathenism, Stephen desired to become a missionary in this land. He immediately dedicated himself to the studying of the language of the Perms and when he mastered the language, he composed an alphabet and translated the ecclesiastical books into that language. With the blessing of the Metropolitan of Moscow, Stephen, as a presbyter, started out on his apostolic mission and with apostolic zeal began to preach the Gospel in this dense darkness of the heathenism of Perm. Having baptized a few souls, he endeavored to build a church in Perm dedicated to the Holy Annunciation. When the Church of God flourished in Perm, he was consecrated as its bishop. Undergoing every hardship, affliction, maliciousness and humiliation, he succeeded to dispel the darkness among the heathens of Perm and to illuminate them with the Light of Christ. In his old age he returned to Moscow once more but, there ended his earthly life and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 1396 AD.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT BASIL OF AMASEA

**In the dungeon, Basil languishes
For the honorable Cross and the Faith of Christ;
Psalms he chants and to God he gives thanks,
Because of justice, He granted him suffering
The Emperor's Tribune to Basil speaks:
Listen old man, to you the emperor a message is sending
(Emperor) Licinius, the protector of the gods,
That you, sacrifice to the gods, offer,
And, Christ the man to dismiss,
If you do not, an evil death awaits you.
Basil radiates from joy,
And to the Tribune, he wonderfully responds:
Go tell your nefarious emperor:
Even if your entire kingdom to me you gave,
And take away my resurrected Christ,
You will take more than you give.
Traitor of Christ the Savior,
Me, a traitor also, do you want to make?
O Giver of death; of death I am not afraid,
Of Christ the Life-giver, I am a servant.**

REFLECTION

The saints are alive and their God-given power does not diminish in time. St. Joannicius of Devich works miracles today even as he did during his life on earth, some five-hundred years ago. A certain Milosh from Hercegovina prepared to travel to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage to the holy shrines. As he was about ready to depart on his way, St. Joannicius appeared to him in a dream and told him not to go to Jerusalem. Rather than go to Jerusalem, it would be better for you to go to Devich, explained the saint, and there, to restore my church and place it in order. Milosh obeyed the saint and arrived at the neglected Devich, cleaned it, placed it in order and again, made it possible to sing praises to God. At Devich, Milosh was tonsured a monk and remained there until the end of his life. During the First World War and the Austrian occupation, a Hungarian officer with a detachment of soldiers came to Devich. The officer ushered Damaskin, the abbot of the monastery, before the reliquary of St. Joannicius and asked him what was under the slab? "Holiness," replied the abbot. "What kind of holiness?", the officer laughed. "Some things are hidden under there." He then ordered the soldiers to strike the slab with pick axes and to overturn it. While this was being done, the officer was seized with pain around his waist. He lay down in bed and before evening of the same day, he died. The frightened soldiers left there work undone and fled the monastery.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How His Resurrection is a great light which dispels the darkness of our doubt, ignorance and despair relative to life after death;
2. How His Resurrection is a great light, which illuminates the path on which we must travel in this world in order to arrive to the other world.

HOMILY

-About Christ as the confirmation of all good-

"For the son of God, Jesus Christ, Who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me, was not "yes" and "no," but "yes" has been in him" (2 Corinthians 1:19).

Christ is not light and darkness but only light. Christ is not truth and falsehood, but only truth. Neither is Christ life and death, He is only life. Neither is He strength and weakness. He is only strength. Neither is He love and hate. He is only love. He is the "yes" for every good and in Him there is no vacillating between "yes" and "no." His teaching is all pure, all truth, all light and all loving of mankind. His path is accurately hewn and He does not permit swerving neither to the left or to the right. Not even a shadow of sin can pause on His teaching nor find a place on His path. His person is the incarnation of good and all that is good is in Him and all that is sin, falsehood, malicious and unjust is outside of Him.

Such teaching, such a path and such a person of Christ, the apostles of God preached: the teaching meant the confirmation of good and the revelation of the infinite treasury of good; the path which leads to the realization and eternal enjoyment of this good; the Person, Who in Himself, contains all good and complete confirmation of good.

Brethren, let us also adhere to this unique Person, this unique path and this unique teaching.

Almighty Lord, help us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, so that our insignificant life on earth would become a confirmation of good and not the denial of good.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE SIMEON

Simeon was one of the Seventy Apostles. He was the son of Cleopas who was the brother of Joseph, the betrothed of the All-Holy Mother of God. Seeing the miracles of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Simeon believed and was numbered among the Seventy Apostles. He preached the Gospel of Christ with great zeal and courage throughout Judea. When the nefarious Jews killed James, the brother of our Lord and first bishop of the Church of Jerusalem, by hurling him from the heights of the Temple and beat him over the head with a hoe, then this Simeon, a cousin of James, was appointed Bishop of Jerusalem. And Simeon, as the second bishop of the Holy City, governed the Church of God with wisdom and strength until a ripe old age. He was over one hundred years old when he suffered. His suffering was in this manner: during the reign of Emperor Trajan, a two-fold persecution began: one in Palestine against the descendants of David and the other persecution against the Christians. The wicked people accused Simeon of being both one and the other (a Jew and a Christian). St. Simeon endured enormous pains and finally was crucified on a cross, as was his Lord, Whom he faithfully served on earth.

2. VENERABLE STEPHEN, THE BISHOP OF VLADIMIR

Stephen was a disciple of St. Theodosius of the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. For a while, Stephen was abbot of the Monastery of the Caves and labored much in the regulation and organization of the monastic life and in adornment of churches. The devil incited malice among the monks against Stephen and, not only did they remove him as abbot, but banished him from the monastery. God, Who does not abandon the righteous for long under the humiliation of the unrighteous, directed the life of Venerable Stephen so that he was elected as Bishop of Vladimir. As a hierarch of God, Stephen governed the Church until old age and died peacefully in the Lord in the year 1094 A.D.

3. THE BURNING OF THE RELICS OF SAINT SAVA

Sava was the Archbishop of the Serbs. The body of St. Sava was buried in Miletchevo Monastery. During the time of the Turkish tyranny, the Serbian people gathered around the relics of their saint to seek comfort and healing. Fearing that an insurrection might arise from that place against the Turks, Sinan Pasha of Belgrade ordered that the relics of St. Sava be translated to Belgrade and there to be burned on Vracar, April 27, 1594 A.D. With the burning of the relics of this saint, the rabid Pasha did not burn the saint who remained alive before the Throne of God in the heavens and in the hearts of his people on earth.

4. VENERABLE JOHN THE CONFESSOR

John was the Abbott of the Cathar Monastery. This monastery was established near Nicaea during the reign of Justin in the sixth century. Because of his veneration of icons and his defense for the veneration of icons, John suffered much at the hands of the Emperors Leo and Theophilus and died in exile around the year 832 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE SIMEON

Simeon, glistening with youth and strength,
When he, the good Teacher approached
Saw not a relative, known to him according to the flesh
But, the unknown God in bodily form;
And the entire world became dark to him from this great light,
When he came to himself, with the world He parted
And as a powerful eagle in lofty flight
Toward heaven and the heavenly world, he raises his spirit.
He, through Christ, recognized the goodness of God,
And immortal life and immortal beauty
Yet through Christ, True Man he recognized,
That is why he scorns glory and the honor of this age;
As a honey bee, he devoted himself to labor,
Not grieving over youth, not grieving over the body,
But, to the end to fulfill the law of Christ
And to become worthy of Paradise divine.
And crucified on the Cross, the elder centenarian,
Did not feel the deadly sting,
For with the spirit, long ago he resurrected,
Now waits with the body to resurrect gloriously.

REFLECTION

The True Faith must be persecuted in this world. The Savior Himself said this clearly and openly to His apostles. St. Apollinaris of Hierapolis in writing against the Montanist heretics says: " Let them tell us before God who, out of all their prophets, beginning with Montanus and his wives, was persecuted by the Jews and killed by the ungodly? No one. Who, from among them was taken away for of the Name of Christ and was crucified on the cross? Again, no one. Have any one of the women ever been flogged or stoned in the Jewish synagogues? Nowhere and never." However, the Orthodox saint wants to say, that the True Faith must be persecuted in this world. Heresies are generally closer to the worldly and demonic spirit, which is why the world and the demon do not persecute their own. To be constantly persecuted, with brief intervals in between, is a characteristic of the Faith and of the Orthodox Church. This persecution existed throughout all of history, either from without or within; externally from unbelievers and internally from heretics.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He commands that repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in His Name;
2. How He commands His disciples to await the Father's promise of the power of the Holy Spirit from on high.

HOMILY

-About the persecution of the pious-

"It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts of the Apostles 14:22).

"In fact, all who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

The Lord Jesus prophesied this and by His example He proved it. The apostles also said this and by their examples they proved it. All the God-bearing Fathers of the Church, confessors and martyrs said this and they proved this by their example. Therefore, is there any need to doubt that, through a narrow door, one enters the kingdom of God? Should we hesitate for a moment that, **"it is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God?"** No, there is no basis nor justification for doubt. Can sheep live among the wolves and not be attacked by them? Can a candle burn in the midst of cross winds and not sway back and forth? Can a good fruit-bearing tree grow along side the road and not be disturbed by passersby? Thus, the Church of pious souls cannot but be persecuted and be persecuted by heathens, by idolaters, by heretics, by apostates, from passions and vices, from sin and transgressions, from the world and by demons. So it is that not one devout soul can remain without persecution, be it externally or internally, until it is separated from the body and the world. Someone might oppose this and prove it otherwise according to his calculation and according to his logic. But, in this case, neither the mind nor the logic of one man is of any avail. Thousands who were crucified speak otherwise, thousands burned alive cry out otherwise, thousands who were beheaded prove otherwise and thousands who were drowned witness otherwise. O my brethren, the Christian Faith is mighty not only when it agrees with sensory reasoning and sensory logic but when, and especially when, it contradicts sensory reasoning and sensory logic.

Those who want to live a godly-life will be persecuted. This the apostle prophesied at the beginning of the Christian era and twenty Christian centuries render a multi-voiced echo to confirm the truth of the prophecy.

O resurrected Lord, grant us light that we may be pious to the end and give us the strength to endure persecution to the end.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

APRIL - 28 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES JASON, SOSIPATER AND THE VIRGIN CERCYRA

The first two were of the Seventy Apostles and the latter was the daughter of a king from the island of Corfu. Jason and Sosipater are mentioned by St. Paul and he calls them his relatives. **"Jason and Sosipater, my relatives" (Romans 16:21).** Jason was born in Tarsus as was the Apostle Paul and Sosipater was born in Achaea. The first was appointed bishop of Tarsus by the apostle and the other was appointed bishop of Iconium. Traveling about and preaching the Gospel these two apostles arrived on the island of Corfu, where they succeeded to build a church to the honor of St. Stephen the First-martyr and to win over some heathens to the Church. The king of the island threw them both into prison where seven thieves were also imprisoned. Their names were: Sagornius, Jakishol, Faustian, Januarius, Marsalus, Euphrasius and Mamminus. The apostles converted these seven to the Faith of Christ and turned these wolves into lambs. Upon hearing this, the king ordered that these seven be put to death in boiling pitch. Thus, they received the wreath of the martyrs. While the king was torturing the apostles, his daughter, the virgin Cercyra, watched from the window at the suffering of these men of God and learning for what reason they were being tortured, she declared herself a Christian and distributed all of her jewels to the poor. The king became enraged at his daughter and closed her in a special prison. Since he did not succeed to dissuade her from Christ by this imprisonment, he ordered that the prison be burned. The prison burned, but the virgin remained alive. Upon seeing this miracle many people were baptized. The infuriated king then ordered his daughter to be tied to a tree and Cercyra was slain by arrows. Those who believed in Christ fled from the terrible king to the nearest island and hid themselves. The king pursued them by boat in order to apprehend them, but the boat sank into the sea and thus the unrighteous one perished as did the one-time pharaoh. The new king embraced the Faith of Christ, was baptized and received the name Sebastian. Jason and Sosipater freely preached the Gospel and strengthened the Church of God in Corfu. They lived to a ripe old age and there ended their earthly life and took up habitation in the mansions of the Lord.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS MAXIMUS, DADA AND QUINTILIAN

Maximus, Dada and Quintilian suffered during the reign of Diocletian. They were tried and tortured by Commander Tarquinius. After imprisonment and torturing, they were all beheaded.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR TIBALD

Tibald was a Slav from Pannonia. During the reign of Diocletian he was brutally tortured for the Faith of Christ and suffered in a place called Tsibal.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY VIRGIN CERCYRA

The virgin Cercyra, both tender and pure,
From the imperial court, heard about the Name of Christ,
And that Holy Name overpowered her heart,
And ready was she to suffer for Him.
The father instructs his daughter, but how? And to what?
God is One, father, bow down to Him!
Through Christ is His love manifested,
With that love now I am seized
For myself I do not mourn, neither of torture am I afraid,
You do what you wish, before God I stand.
Cercyra the virgin in the flame stands,
Quiet, meek and radiant like a dove.
A crimson flame rages, the entire dungeon cracks,
Cercyra's heart beats unafraid,
Prayer and hope nests in her heart,
With that, the fire she overcame, and not the fire her,
With love divine, the virgin pierced with arrows,
From the vanity of the world, easily separated,
Her body, by deadly arrows shattered -
The soul of the virgin, the Lord received intact.

REFLECTION

The mystery of our salvation is concluded with the appearance of God among men in the human body. St. Meliton of Sardis writes: "The works of Christ, following His baptism, manifested and proved to the world that in His body, His divinity was hidden. Being God, He was also perfect man. He revealed to us His two natures. Divinity, by His miracles performed throughout the three years following His baptism and, His humanity, throughout those years when the weakness of the flesh hid the signs of His divinity, even though He was truly the Eternal God." The manner of the union of divinity with humanity is difficult to comprehend but the event of the appearance of God as a man among men is perfectly comprehensible from the concept of the love of God for man. Not even the creation of the world, as an event, is more comprehensible; one can say even less comprehensible--than the event above the events: the Incarnation of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Ascension of the Lord Jesus:

1. How He led His disciples to a hill toward Bethany;
2. How, with up-lifted hands, He blesses the disciples.

HOMILY

-About seeking the face of the Lord-

"Your presence, O Lord, I seek" (Psalms 27:8).

"Let Your face shine upon Your servant" (Psalm 31:16).

King David sought that which the simple fishermen received without seeking. King David was reclining in darkness and was yearning to see the glowing face of the Lord, which was revealed to the simple fishermen in its complete radiance. King David belonged to the period of waiting, but the disciples belonged to the period of fulfillment. **There** [the period of waiting] it was only **the announcement of the coming of the Lord**, but **here**, [the period of fulfillment] **the coming of the Lord**. **There** a presentiment and day dreams about the face of the Lord, **here** radiance and beauty of that same face. The face of the Lord was radiant even before the resurrection and how much more radiant after the resurrection! The inextinguishable flame of Divinity hid behind the icon of His body and shown through that bodily icon. The disciples gazed upon Him fixedly and they rejoiced in their hearts. For forty days they gazed upon His glorified body and they rejoiced in their hearts!

O my brethren, let us also seek the radiant face of the Lord in order to feel the pleasure by which the angels of God become intoxicated. If we are going to seek Him with yearning in this life, then we will see Him, at least, in the other life. If we do not seek Him in this life, then we will not see him either in this life or in the other life. Brethren, let us yearn for the face of Christ! His every word shows us one feature of His face. Each of His apostles shows us some characteristic of His face. His every deed shows us some feature of His face. Each of His saints shows us some ray of His radiant face. With yearning brethren, let us exam the face of the Lord. Let us assemble ray after ray until it reveals the entire sun. Let us enshrine that Sun in the depths of our hearts, that it illuminates our bodily courts from within. Let us plant this inexpressible sweet vineyard in our heart that we may taste of that immortal drink by which the angels become intoxicated.

O Lord, bearer of light, show Your radiant face to us, Your servants.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT BASIL OF OSTROG

Basil was born in Popova, a village in Hercegovina of simple and God-fearing parents. From his youth, he was filled with love for the Church of God and when he reached maturity, he entered to the Monastery of the Dormition (Assumption) of the Birth-giver of God in Trebinje and there received the monastic tonsure. As a monk, he quickly became renowned because of his genuine and rare ascetical life. Saint Basil took upon himself mortification upon mortification each one heavier and more difficult than the last. Later, against his will, he was elected and consecrated bishop of Zahumlje and Skenderia. As a hierarch, he first lived in the Monastery Tvrdosh and from there, as a good shepherd, strengthened his flock in the Orthodox Faith, protecting them from the cruelty of the Turks and the cunning ways of the Latins. When Basil was exceedingly pressed by his enemies and, when Tvrdosh was destroyed by the Turks, he moved to Ostrog, where he lived an austere ascetical life, protecting his flock by his ceaseless and fervent prayer.(*). He died peacefully in the Lord in the sixteenth century, leaving behind his incorruptible relics; incorruptible and miracle-working to the present day. The miracles at the grave of St. Basil are without number. Christians and Muslims alike come before his relics and find healing of their most grave illnesses and afflictions. A great people's assembly (pilgrimage) occurs there annually on the Feast of Pentecost.

(*) A new church was built upon the ruins of the old Tvrdosh Monastery in our day by Nikola Runjevac from the village of Poljica near Trebinje. A wonderful and glorious monumental church (Zaduzbina) before God and before His people.

2. THE NINE MARTYRS IN CYZICUS

These nine brave martyrs, enflamed with love for Christ, refused to offer sacrifices to the idols or to deny Christ the Lord, for which they were brutally tortured and finally beheaded. During the reign of Emperor Constantine, a church was built in Cyzicus in honor of these martyrs where their incorruptible relics were placed. Countless healings have taken place over their relics. Their names were: THEOGONIUS, RUFUS, ANTIPATER, THEOCTIST, ARTEMAS, MAGNUS, THEODOTUS, THAUMASILUS AND PHILEMON. All of them despised everything temporal for the eternal, the corruptible for the incorruptible. That is why the Lord led them to His eternal home and crowned them with unfading wreaths of glory. They suffered honorably and were glorified in the eighth century.

3. VENERABLE MEMNON THE WONDER-WORKER

From his youth Memnon dedicated himself to fasting, prayer and purified himself so much that he became a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. He healed incurable diseases and worked many other miracles. He appeared on the tempests of the seas and rescued ships from disaster. He died peacefully in the Lord in the second century and took up habitation in the heavenly courts of the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT BASIL OF OSTROG

Saint Basil, one chosen by God,
And of every affliction, wondrous healer,
With the power of your Christ, Whom you greatly loved,
The gravest of the ill, you were able to heal,
Even now, for anyone who honors you, you are able [to do]
And who firmly believe in the Living God.
O glory of the Serbian people, do not cease to help,
For the sinful, do not cease to pray.
In heavenly glory, you are a saint of God
And saints are men with a full healthy spirit,
In you [Basil] we see a true man,
Free from sin and overly filled with healing,
In whom the fire of the Holy Spirit burns,
In whom the love of the resurrected Christ stands.
To the All-powerful God and to you, we are grateful,
Because through you, God pours out abundant mercy,
Through His saint, glorious and of angelic face -
Basil the Serbian, God's chosen one!

REFLECTION

Nothing can be kept secret from our Omniscient God. At every moment, to Him is known all that is being done in the world; both in the external as well as in the internal, spiritual world. Not one intention, not one desire, not one thought of his can man conceal from God. How can you hide from God that which you cannot hide from men; from holy men! One day, Tsar Ivan the Terrible came to church to pray to God. In the church, Blessed Basil, "the fool for Christ," stood for prayer. It is true the Tsar was in church physically, but his thoughts were on the Hill of the Sparrow, a short distance from Moscow, upon which he had begun to construct a palace. Throughout the liturgical services the Tsar thought about how he could extend and complete his palace on that hill. After the services the Tsar noticed Basil and asked him: "Where have you been?" Basil replied: "In church." Basil then immediately asked the Tsar: "O Tsar and where were you?" "I, also, was in church, " answered the Tsar. To that the discerning saint replied: "You are not speaking the truth Ivanushka for I perceived how, in your thoughts, you were pacing about on the Hill of the Sparrow and building a palace."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Ascension of the Lord Jesus:

1. How the Lord, blessing His disciples, is raised above the earth and is ascending into Heaven;
2. How the disciples watched Him as He was ascending until a cloud hid Him from their sight.

HOMILY

-About the incomparable love of Christ-

"And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19).

"The love of Christ that surpasses knowledge!" Surpasses, not the knowledge of God, but surpasses the knowledge of man, darkened and embittered by sin. God's knowledge is equal to God's love and neither surpasses the other. But man's knowledge, alienated from God, does not comprehend God's love at all, shown through the Lord Jesus Christ. God understands man but man does not understand God. God attempted, by reason, to enable man to understand through nature and through the Old Revelation, through the Law and the prophets, but man did not want to submit to that knowledge. Then, God attempted to overcome men through love and through this love to draw them to Himself. From that [love] comes the Incarnation of the Son of God, from that [love] thence is His sacrifice and His suffering to the death. Such inexpressible love of God, beyond words and knowledge, have captured and returned many to God, i.e., made them to understand; gave them a new knowledge, pure and bright. But, it confused many of them, again, for it did not agree with their darkened and embittered understanding.

"And to know," says the apostle. How can we brethren, know that which is beyond knowing and beyond understanding? In no other way than by a change of mind, awakening and sharpening of the mind, illumination and elevation of the mind: in brief, the acquiring of a new mind, which would have the capability to understand the love of Christ which is beyond the present sinful mind of men.

O the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge! Whoever even approaches just a little closer to You that one feels that You are, at the same time, the depth of the love of God.

O Lord, ascended into heaven, illumine our mind with Your understanding that we may more easily adopt Your unfathomable love toward mankind and weep--weep from sorrow because of our hardened hearts and because of our darkened and malicious minds and weep because of joy, because of Your love toward us, who are darkened and embittered.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE JAMES

James was the son of Zebedee, brother of John and one of the Twelve Apostles. At the invitation of the Lord Jesus, James left the fishermen's net, his father and, together with John, immediately followed after the Lord. He belonged to that trinity of apostles to whom the Lord revealed the greatest mysteries; before whom He was transfigured on Tabor and before whom He lamented before His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. After receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, he preached the Gospel in various places and traveled to Spain. Upon his return from Spain, the Jews began to quarrel with him concerning Holy Scripture and no one was able to withstand him, not even a certain magician Hermogenes. Hermogenes and his disciple Philip were defeated by the power of truth which James preached and, both of them were baptized. Then the Jews accused him before Herod and persuaded Josias to slander the apostle. Josias, seeing the brave conduct of James and listening to his clear explanation about the truth, repented and believed in Christ. When James was condemned to death, this same Josias was also condemned to death. Enroute to the place of execution, Josias implored James to forgive him the sin of slander. James embraced and kissed him and said: "Peace and forgiveness be to you!" Both of them bowed their heads under the sword and were beheaded for the Lord Whom they loved and Whom they served. Saint James suffered in Jerusalem in the year 45 A.D. His body was translated to Spain, where miraculous healings occurred over his grave and, do so even today.

2. SAINT DONATUS

Donatus was bishop of Evira in Albania. He was endowed by God with the great blessing of miracle-working, by which he performed many miracles for the benefit of the people. Donatus changed bitter water into sweet water; brought down rain during a drought; healed the king's daughter of insanity; and resurrected a man from the dead. This deceased man had repaid his debt to a certain creditor. This unscrupulous creditor wanted the debt to be repaid a second time and, wanting to benefit from the death of his debtor, he came to his widow and demanded that the debt be repaid immediately. The widow wept and complained to the bishop. St. Donatus warned the creditor to wait, at least, until the man was buried and then the debt would be discussed. The creditor angrily insisted his own. Then Donatus approached the dead man, touched him and cried out: "Arise brother and see what you have with your creditor!." The dead man rose and with a frightening glance looked at his lender and related to him the time, when and where he had repaid the debt. He also sought from the lender his written receipt. The frightened lender then placed a document into his hands and the enlivened deceased tore it up and again lay down and died. St. Donatus died peacefully in very old age and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 387 A.D. His relics repose in Evira, Albania and, even today, benefit the faithful.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR ARGYRA

Argyra, this neo-martyr was born in Brusa, of devout parents. As soon as Argyra was married to a Christian, a certain Turk from the neighborhood fell in love with her and invited her to live with him. The Christ-loving Argyra rejected such a vile proposal of this Turk. He became so enraged and accused her before the judge saying that she had wanted to embrace Islam and later reneged. This holy Argyra spent fifteen years suffering for Christ, going from judge to judge and from prison to prison. She loved Christ above everything in this world. She finally died in prison in Constantinople in the year 1725 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE JAMES

**Zebedee's James, one of three was,
Who saw the most miraculous mysteries of Christ,
Who saw the Transfiguration of the Savior,
In clothing white, with a flaming countenance,
And again in the Garden they saw Him sorrowful,
As a helpless prisoner, in the cage of the world.
By this contradiction, James was confused,
Until, enlightened he was, by the light of the Resurrection.
And when the Lord arose, James believed;
Ripped asunder the doubts as a cloud of dreams!
And yet, when the Spirit descended and the power to him, He gave,
James, victorious commander he became.
Day and night, he began to wage war,
And with God's help, miracles to work.
All for the Name of Christ; all in the glory of Christ,
Until that Holy Name did glisten in the world.
In vain did bloody Herod behead him
His commander God, granted him eternal glory.**

REFLECTION

A devout elder lay on his death bed. His friends gathered around him and mourned him. With that, the elder laughed three times. The monks asked him: "What are you laughing at?" The elder replied: "I laughed the **first time**, because all of you are afraid of death; **the second time**, for none of you are prepared for death; **the third time**, because I am going from labor to rest." Behold, how a righteous man dies! He is not afraid of death. He is prepared for death. He sees, that through death, he passes from the difficult life to eternal rest. When the nature of man imagines itself in its original state in Paradise then, death is unnatural, the same way that sin is unnatural. Death emanated from sin. Repented and cleansed from sin, man does not consider death annihilation, but the gate to life eternal. If, at times, the righteous prayed to God to prolong their earthly life, that was not because of love for this life nor because of the fear of death but solely that they would gain more time for repentance and cleansing from sin in order that they may present themselves before God, more sinless and more pure. Even if they showed fear before death, that was not out of fear of death but the fear of God's judgment. What kind of fear then must the unrepentant sinner have before death?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Ascension of the Lord Jesus:

1. How all the gravitational forces on earth were unable to keep down the body of the Lord from ascending;
2. How by his ascension, the Lord showed Himself to be above the laws of nature.

HOMILY

-About the illumination of Christ-

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5:14).

Saint Paul the apostle, similar to all the other apostles and Christian saints, whatever he teaches to others, he teaches from his own personal experience. For the Faith of Christ is an experience and proof and not a theory of human sophistry. Even Paul lay as one spiritually dormant and, he was spiritually dead while he opposed the Christian Faith. St. Paul was awakened, arose, resurrected in the spirit and was illumined by Christ. He knows himself from the time when he was spiritually dormant and from the time when he became awakened, and when he arose, and when he was resurrected by the Spirit and when he was illumined by Christ. That which he knows about himself as a Christian, he commends to others. As an apostle, he sees himself in a great light and believes that all other men, if they so desire, can be as bright as he is. The light is not his, but Christ's light. His is only the love for that Light, Who is Christ.

The illumination of Christ is necessary for man in the beginning as well as in the end. For without Christ's illumination man is unable either to awaken, or to arise, or to resurrect from the dead, as afterwards, he is unable to live alone by himself in faith or to die in hope. Christ is needed in the beginning as well as in the end. As to a drowning child the hand of the parent is needed to retrieve him from the water and afterward to lead him on dry land, protecting him and preventing him from drowning again; thus Christ is needed for those drowning in the waters of sin. The apostle himself received the illumination of Christ in the beginning on the road to Damascus and, again, he received it later. The first illumination was his conversion to Christ and the second illumination was the confirmation of himself in Christ. The first illumination we all receive through baptism and later, through faith, and the fulfilling of the commandments of the Lord. All of those who do not possess the illumination of Christ, either they have had it and lost it, are dormant as though dead.

O gentle Lord, awaken us, uplift us, resurrect us, for we cannot do any of these things without You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MAY

1. THE HOLY PROPHET JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was born about six hundred years before Christ in the village of Anathoth not far from Jerusalem. He began to prophesy at the age of fifteen during the reign of King Josiah. He preached repentance to the king and noblemen, false prophets and priests. During the reign of King Josiah, Jeremiah barely escaped death from the murdering hands of the enraged nobles. Concerning King Jehoiakim, he prophesied that the king's burial would be like the burial of an ass, i.e., his dead body would be tossed outside Jerusalem and that his body would be dragged along the ground without benefit of burial: **"He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:18)**. Because of this, Jeremiah was cast into a prison. Not being able to write in prison, Jeremiah invited Baruch [the son of Neriah], who stood near the small window of the prison and dictated to him. When this prophecy was read to the king, the enraged king grabbed the paper and threw it into a fire. Divine Providence saved Jeremiah from prison and the word of the prophet was fulfilled in Jehoiakim. Concerning King Jeconiah [son of Jehoiakim, King of Judah], Jeremiah prophesied that Jeconiah would be taken to Babylon with his entire family and that he would die there. All of which came about shortly: **". . . after that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away captive Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah" (Jeremiah 24:1)**. **". . . when he carried away captive Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 27:20)**. Under King Zedekiah, Jeremiah placed a yoke around his own neck and walked through Jerusalem prophesying the fall of Jerusalem and bondage under the yoke of the Babylonians. **"Thus said the Lord to me; Make thee bonds and yokes and put them upon thy neck" (Jeremiah 27:2)**. **"I spoke also to Zedekiah, king of Judah, according to all these words saying, bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live" (Jeremiah 27:12)**. To the Hebrew captives in Babylon, Jeremiah wrote telling them not to hope for a speedy return to Jerusalem for they would remain in Babylon for seventy years, which came to pass. **"This whole land shall be a ruin and a desert. Seventy years these nations shall be enslaved to the king of Babylon" (Jeremiah 25:11)**. In the valley of Topheth near Jerusalem [the Valley of Slaughter], where the Jews offered children as a sacrifice to the idols, Jeremiah took a potter's clay vessel in his hands and shattered it before the people prophesying the impending humbling of the kingdom of Judah. **"Even so, I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel that cannot be made whole again" (Jeremiah 19:11)**. The Babylonians shortly captured Jerusalem, slew King Zedekiah, plundered and destroyed the city, and beheaded a great number of Jews in the Valley of Topheth on the same spot where children were slaughtered for sacrifice to the idols and where the Prophet Jeremiah smashed the potter's vessel of clay. Jeremiah, with the Levites, removed the Ark of the Covenant from the Temple to Mt. Nebo where Moses died and there he hid the Ark in a cave. However, he hid the fire from the Temple in a deep well. Jeremiah was forced by some Jews to accompany them to Egypt where he lived for four years and was then stoned to death by his countrymen. To the Egyptians, Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of their idols and the arrival of the Virgin and the Christ-Child to Egypt. There is a tradition which states that King Alexander the Great visited the tomb of the Prophet Jeremiah. By order of King Alexander, the body of Jeremiah was translated and buried in Alexandria.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYR ACACIUS, THE SANDAL-MAKER

Acacius was from the village of Neochorion near Thessalonica. Mistreated greatly by his master craftsman in Serres, Acacius converted to Islam. Later [he returned to the Faith] and as a penitent and monk, he lived in the Monastery Hilendar [Mt. Athos]. His needy and Christ-loving mother counseled him: "As you willingly denied the Lord, so now you must willingly and bravely accept martyrdom for the Sweet Jesus." The son followed the advice of his mother and with the blessings of the fathers of the Holy Mountain, Acacius traveled to Constantinople where the Turks beheaded him on May 1, 1816 A.D. His head is preserved in a reliquary in the Russian monastery, St. Panteleimon on Mt. Athos.

3. THE VENERABLE PAPHNUTIUS OF BOROVSK

Paphnutius, the son of a Tartar nobleman, later embraced the Christian Faith. At age twenty, Paphnutius was tonsured a monk and continued to live his life in a monastery until his ninety-fourth year, when he reposed in the Lord. Paphnutius was a virgin and an ascetic. Because of this, he became a miracle-worker and discerner. He died in the year 1478 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Jeremiah, chaste one and prophet,
To men, the will of God he proclaims
When in sin, men decay
And the laws of God, they trampled.
The prophet cries out, weeps and threatens,
As a live flame, his words are,
Illumines the righteous, burns the sinners;
As the tears of a mother, his tears are
Over her dying offspring.
The prophet foresees it, punishment is coming,
A punishment, one-hundred fold deserved.
The mercy of God, into justice changes.
The prophet cries out, weeps and threatens,
The sinful people, calls to repentance.
To what the leaders say, the people listen,
And the leaders, at the prophet laugh,
And his words, as a lie they proclaimed!
But himself to be wearied, the prophet does not allow:
With sufferings, his words he seals;
Nefarious men, slew the prophet,
And forever, made him famous.
All the words of the prophet were fulfilled,
The kingdom fell; the prophet glorified.

REFLECTION

The Venerable Paphnutius of Borovsk said to his disciples that a man's soul and his hidden works can be known by the look in his eyes. To his disciples, this seemed unbelievable until this man of God confirmed this in reality on more than one occasion. Discerning the fate of others, Paphnutius also discerned his own fate. A week before, while still in good health, he prophesied that he would depart from this world on the following Thursday. When Thursday dawned, he cried out rejoicingly: "Behold, the day of the Lord, rejoice O you people; behold, the awaited day came!" Behold, this is how a man meets death; a man who, during his entire life, contemplated about separation from this world and about the encounter with God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Ascension of the Lord Jesus:

1. How two angels appeared to the disciples while they were still gazing after the ascended Lord;
2. How the angels proclaim that the Lord will come in the same manner as the disciples saw Him ascending into heaven.

HOMILY

-About the power of the Lord's word-

"Is not My word like the fire, says the Lord, like a hammer shattering rocks " (Jeremiah 23:29).

Yes Lord, Your word is indeed like fire; like fire which warms the righteous and burns the unrighteous. And, indeed, Your word is like a hammer; a hammer which softens the stony hardness of the heart of a penitent and pulverizes the hearts of the unrepentant sinners into dust.

"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us" (St. Luke 24:32), the apostles asked after talking with the resurrected Lord? When the heart in man is correct, it burns from the word of the Lord and it melts from pleasure and expands with love. But, when the heart in man is not correct and hardened by sin, then the heart bakes from the word of the Lord and becomes even harder. **"And pharaoh's heart was hardened" (Exodus 8:19).**

In vain do sinners fortify themselves in the fortresses of stone, in their fortresses of iron, in their fortresses of silver and gold and reject the armor of God's justice. As a powerful and irresistible hammer, such is the word of the Lord when He pronounces judgment upon these fortresses of stone in which sinners fortify themselves.

In vain does the unbeliever fortify his house with impregnable stones and the statesman fortifies the State, hardened with the wisdom of the world, and not hoping in the Living God. The word of the Lord comes down like a hammer upon all that was built apart from God or against God; as a powerful and irresistible hammer.

O brethren, let us not trust in our creations of stone, neither of marble nor of gold or of silver stones nor of the godless stones of our individual thoughts. All of these are weaker before the power of God than dust before the power of the wind.

O Lord Almighty, help us to receive Your word and, that on Your word, we may build our entire life both in this world and in the next world.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

(*) The Egyptians almost deified St. Jeremiah. That is why they buried him as a king. Even after his death, they considered him a miracle-worker. They removed dust from his tomb as a cure against snake bites. Even today, many Christians invoke Jeremiah against serpents.

MAY - 2 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS HESPERUS, ZOE, CYRIAC AND THEODULUS

During the reign of Emperor Hardrian (117-138 A.D.), a pagan named Catallus purchased as slaves Hesperus, his wife Zoe and their sons Cyriac and Theodulus. Since they were steadfast Christians, they would not taste anything of the sacrifices to the idols and, that which was offered to them, they tossed to the dogs and they themselves hungered but endured. Learning of this, Catallus became enraged and began to cruelly torture his slaves. At first he tortured the children, but the children remained unwavering in the Faith and, even more, sought harsher torture from their persecutors. Finally, all four were thrown into a fiery furnace where, after prayers of thanksgiving, they gave up their souls to the Lord. Their bodies remained intact and were not consumed by the fire.

2. SAINT ATHANASIUS THE GREAT, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

On this day the translation of the relics of St. Athanasius, as well as the miracles performed by his relics, is commemorated. The life and work of this great saint is recorded on January 18.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS, SAINT BORIS AND SAINT GLEB

Boris and Gleb were the sons of the great Prince Vladimir, the baptizer of the Russian people. Until his baptism, Vladimir had numerous wives and many children by them. Boris and Gleb were brothers of the same mother. Before his death Vladimir divided up the State among all of his sons. But, Svyatpolk his eldest son, the Prince of Kiev, also desired to usurp the portions intended for Boris and Gleb. That is why he dispatched men to murder Boris who was in one place and to murder Gleb who was in another place. Both brothers were exceptionally pious and, in all things, pleasing to God. They encountered death with prayer and the uplifting of their hearts to God. Their bodies remained uncorrupt and fragrant. Boris and Gleb were buried in Vishgorod where, even today, a blessed power comes from their bodies, which heals men from various diseases and sufferings.

4. SAINT MICHAEL (BORIS), THE BULGARIAN TSAR

Boris was born and educated as a pagan and was baptized under the influence of his uncle Bojan and his sister. At baptism, he was given the name Michael. Patriarch Photius sent him priests who gradually baptized all the Bulgarian people. Many Bulgarian noblemen opposed this new Faith but the new Faith conquered and the Cross glistened on many churches built by the devout Tsar Michael. The Faith among the Bulgarians, as among the Serbs, was especially established by the **Five Followers**, the disciples of St. Cyril and St. Methodius, who preached to the people the knowledge of Christ in the vernacular: the Slavonic language.

In his old age Michael retreated to a monastery and was tonsured a monk. When his son Vladimir began to destroy his father's work and to exterminate Christianity, Michael again donned his military uniform, girded himself with a sword, ousted Vladimir from the throne and installed Simeon, his younger son, as Tsar. After that, he again clothed himself in the monastic habit and retreated in silence where, in mortification and prayer, he completed his earthly life "in the good faith; in the correct confession of our Lord Jesus Christ; great, honorable and devout," and took up habitation in the heavenly life on May 2, 906 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MICHAEL [BORIS] THE BULGARIAN

**Michael the Bulgarian, the people with the Cross he baptized,
Numbered the pagans, into the flock of Christ,
And by his example, touched the hearts of men,
That the saving faith, men may love.
Built churches and paganism weeded out
And in himself, the Spirit of God glorified.
In addition, the glory and vanity of men, he abandoned,
To men, he taught truth and justice.
Did not himself, pity because of God's Name
And for the sake of the salvation of the Bulgarian people.
Wedded was he on earth with a wreath of reigning,
And in heaven, with a wreath of eternal rejoicing.**

REFLECTION

Blessed Maksim, "fool for Christ," walked about unclad throughout the streets of Moscow in winter. In response to the advice of men that he dress and protect himself from the cold, Maxim was known to respond: "Yes, it is bitterly cold, but Paradise is sweet!" He also responded: "For patience, God grants salvation!" When Christ Himself did not feel sorrow to give Himself over to suffering and death, why should we feel sorry for ourselves because of ourselves? He [Christ] prescribed a recipe for us; a diet for our spiritual restoration to health and He called that **"an easy yoke."** **"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (St. Matthew 11:30).** The yoke which we impose upon ourselves is much heavier, for this yoke pulls us down deeper and deeper into spiritual illness. The earth seeks much greater sacrifices from us and does not promise us any reward after death. The earth seeks that we sacrifice even God, soul, conscience, mind and all of human and divine dignity to it and, for this, it shows a dark and putrid grave as the end of everything and reward for all. Christ seeks that we sacrifice only the earth, our beastliness and sin, vice and all wickedness and, for that, He promises resurrection and eternal life in Paradise. "Yes, it is bitterly cold, but Paradise is sweet!"

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Ascension of the Lord Jesus:

1. How the disciples worship Him;
2. How they return to Jerusalem with great joy.

HOMILY

-About the source of living water and the dry cistern-

"Be amazed at this, O heavens, and shudder with sheer horror, says the Lord. Two evils have my people done: they have forsaken Me, the source of living waters. They have dug, themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water (Jeremiah 2: 12-13)."

Is this spoken only for then or also for us today? Certainly for us today. Is this spoken only for the Jewish people or also for our people? Certainly for our people also. As it is said: Do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness. It was said not only for that time but also for all times and not only for the Jewish people but for all peoples. And so this also. This is valid today and always, for all peoples and for every man who turns his back on the source of living water in his own backyard and digs a cistern and drinks rain water from it.

The source of living water is the Lord Himself; inexhaustible, copious and sweet. The cistern is the work of every man which is performed in opposition to God and God's law and from which men expect progress, happiness and satisfaction for their hunger and thirst. Such a cistern is godless, avaricious, gluttonous, immoral, power-hungry, vain, idolatrous, soothsaying and everything else which has the **devil** as an advisor, **sin** as a digger and **false hope** for a water-carrier. **"Be amazed at this O heavens, and shudder with sheer horror"** says the Lord as to how man became senseless and began to forsake the living water and to dig a cistern in hot live coals which inflames his thirst even more!

O brethren, our people have also committed two evils for they forgot the Lord as the source of every good and because they went to seek, for themselves, good in evil and good through evil. Can water be found in fire? Or wheat in sand? It cannot; cannot, brethren. Even less can peace, happiness, joy and life or any other good be found in the cisterns of sin and godlessness.

O Lord, immortal source of every good which the heart of man can desire and which the mind of man can imagine, have mercy on us sinners and unworthy ones. With Your powerful right hand, turn us away from our godless and vain works and quench us with Your sweet and living water.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS TIMOTHY AND MAURA ()*

The fate of these two wonderful martyrs, husband and wife, is amazing! Because of their Christian Faith and only twenty days following their marriage, they were brought to court before Arrianus, the governor of Thebaid, during the reign of Diocletian. Timothy was a lector in his local church. The governor questioned him: "Who are you?" To that Timothy responded: "I am a Christian and a lector of God's Church." The governor further said to him: "Do you not see these instruments prepared for torture surrounding you?" Timothy replied: "And, do you not see all the angels of God who strengthen me?" Then the governor ordered an iron rod be pierced through his ears so that the pupils of his eyes protruded from pain. After that, they hung him upside down and placed a piece of wood in his mouth. At first, Maura was frightened because of Timothy's sufferings, but when her husband encouraged her, she also confessed her steadfast faith before the governor. The governor then ordered all the hairs of her head pulled out and after that severed the fingers from her hands. After many other tortures, from which they would have succumbed had not the Grace of God strengthened them, they were both crucified facing each other. Thus, hanging on the cross, they lived for nine days counseling and encouraging each other in perseverance. On the tenth day, they gave up their souls to their Lord for Whom they endured death on a cross and so were made worthy of His kingdom. They suffered honorably for Christ in the year 286 A.D.

(*) The name Maura[Mavra] means black. Therefore, in Macedonia, the feast day of these two saints is referred to as Black's Day or Black Day. On the island of Zacynthus, there exists a church dedicated to Saints Timothy and Maura in which many miracles of healing took place.

2. THE VENERABLE THEODOSIUS OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

From his early youth, Theodosius shunned laughter and rejoicing and dedicated himself to godly-thoughts and prayers. Because of this, he was often abused by his mother, especially one day, when his mother noticed an iron belt around his naked body from which his shirt was bloodied. Having once read the words of the Savior in the Gospel **"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (St. Matthew 10:37)**, Theodosius left the home of his parents and fled to the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev to see the Venerable Anthony. Anthony received him and, shortly afterwards, tonsured him a monk. When his mother found him and asked him to return home, he counseled his mother and she also entered a convent and was tonsured a nun. Theodosius shortly surpassed all the monks by his mortification, meekness and goodness, and became very dear to Anthony who installed him as abbot of the monastery. During the time that he was abbot, the brotherhood of the monastery greatly increased, churches and cells were built and the Constitution [the Rule] of the Studite Monastery was introduced in its entirety. God endowed Theodosius with abundant grace because of his virginal purity, great labor in prayer, love toward his fellow man and so this man of God possessed great power over unclean spirits, healed diseases and discerned the fate of men. Along with St. Anthony, Theodosius is considered the founder and organizer of monasticism in Russia. He died peacefully in the year 1074 A.D. His healing relics repose next to the relics of Anthony.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TIMOTHY AND SAINT MAURA

Timothy and Maura, crucified and pale,
Through the Lord Christ, looked at one another,
And by the spirit see each other better than with the eyes,
By pain exalted, above all things.
And Timothy speaks: Maura, my sister,
You are of a female nature, and your pain is greater!
By prayer be encouraged, do not despair sister,
All of your thoughts, affix to Christ.
Maura replied: Brother Timothy,
The Spirit of God I feel, in my soul it waves
He keeps me strong, and helpless, He strengthens me,
And the Sweet Jesus, my pains alleviates,
But, about you, my glorious pride, I am concerned,
What kind of pains, with yours can be similar?
But just a little while, a little while, my sweet brother,
From the thorns of sufferings, then the roses will blossom,
To the entire heavenly host, the darling you will be,
Only endure, endure without sound and sobbing
Let us be alert brother, let us not fall asleep,
Perhaps the Lord might come, that we not be ashamed.
Behold, the entire heavens opened, I see
Unseen treasures for us prepared.
Then Timothy to Maura: O sister, wonderful,
Bride of Christ, glorious martyr,
For His glorious mercy, let us glorify God,
That such an honorable death, He permitted upon us.
O glory to You O Savior, Who for us suffered;
Our spirit, we now commend into Your hands.

REFLECTION

The Abba John the Short asked the monks: "Who sold Joseph?" One monk replied: "His brothers." To that, the elder replied: "No brethren, rather his humility. Joseph could have said that he is their brother and could have protested to being sold but he remained silent. His humility, therefore, sold him. Afterward, this same humility made him master over Egypt." In surrendering ourselves to the will of God, we defend ourselves too much from external unpleasantness, that is why we lose the good fruits which is harvested at the end of unpleasantness endured with humility. Abba Pimen wisely spoke: "We have abandoned the easy yoke, i.e., self-reproach and we have burdened ourselves with a heavy yoke, i.e., self-justification." The Christian accepts every unpleasantness as deserving of their present or their past sins; seeking in all, the will of God with faith and awaiting the end with hope.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the ascended Lord Jesus:

1. How He began His saving work on earth as an ordinary humble worker;
2. How He completed His saving work by His miraculous and glorious ascension into heaven.

HOMILY

-About how the idol-worshippers will be put to shame-

"As the thief is ashamed when caught, so shall the house of Israel be ashamed: They who say to a piece of wood, 'You are my father' and to a stone 'You gave me birth:' They turn to Me their backs, not their faces; yet in time of trouble they cry out, 'Rise up and save us !' " (Jeremiah 2: 26-27).

In truth brethren, they will all be put to shame who do not see beyond wood and stone and, who in their ignorance, say that man is composed entirely of plants and minerals and the same thing occurs to him as with plants and minerals. With their backs turned to the Creator, they are unable to see anything other than creation and, forgetting the Creator, they proclaim creation the Creator. They say that nature created and gave birth to man, that is why man is lesser than nature, lower than nature, the servant in the lap of nature, a slave on the chain of nature and a dead man in the grave of nature. They who speak like that will be shamed when they fall into misfortune and cry out to God: **"Rise up and save us!"**

Why do they cry out to God **"Rise up"** as though God is lying down? God is not lying down, but stands; stands and waits to be of service to everyone who, with faith and humility, request a favor from Him. But those who have become enamored with wood and stone, while they have trusted in their own power, have overturned Him in their lives and excluded Him from their lives. That is why when they are pressured by difficulties, they cry out to Him: **"Rise up!"**

But the Lord is meek and rises and comes to the aid of every penitent. Let the sinner truly repent and casting off his sinful love, return to God in love and God will help him. Let him turn his back on dead wood and stone and turn his face to the Living God and God will redeem him. For the Almighty is not vengeful and vindictive. Neither did He create man for death, but for life.

O brethren, let us not seek help in the helpless nor life in the lifeless. Let us turn our heads toward our living Creator Who gave us a face more radiant than the face of every earthly thing. Let us turn from the western ways to the eastern path, for on this path is salvation. Just let us hasten before our last day on earth is sunk into the darkness of the west.

O ascended Lord, raise our minds to heaven. Cleanse them from the darkness and unburden them of the earth, O our Light-bearing Creator.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR PELAGIA OF TARSUS

Pelagia was born in the town of Tarsus of pagan but distinguished and wealthy parents. Hearing about Christ and the salvation of souls from Christians, she burned with love for the Savior and, in her soul, was totally Christian. At that time there was a terrible persecution of Christians. It so happened that the Emperor Diocletian stopped off at Tarsus and during the time of his stay in Tarsus, his son, the crown prince fell deeply in love with Pelagia and wanted to take her as his wife. Pelagia replied through her nefarious mother that she had already been betrothed to her heavenly Bridegroom, Christ the Lord. Fleeing from the profane crown prince and her wicked mother, Pelagia sought and found Bishop Linus, a man distinguished for his holiness. He instructed Pelagia in the Christian Faith and baptized her. Then Pelagia gave away her luxurious garments, much wealth, returned home and confessed to her mother that she is already baptized. Learning of this and having lost all hope that he will gain this holy virgin for his wife, the crown prince stabbed himself with a sword and died. The wicked mother denounced her daughter before the emperor and turned her over to him for trial. The emperor was amazed at the beauty of this young virgin and, forgetting his son, became inflamed with impure passions toward her. But since Pelagia remained unwavering in her faith, the emperor sentenced her to be burned alive in a metal ox, glowing with a red-hot fire. When the executioner stripped her, St. Pelagia made the sign of the cross and with a prayer of thanksgiving to God on her lips, entered the glowing ox where, in the twinkling of an eye, she completely melted like wax. Pelagia suffered honorably in the year 287 A.D. The remains of her bones were acquired by Bishop Linus and he buried them on a hill under a stone. At the time of Emperor Constantine Copronymos (741-775 A.D) and, on that exact spot, a beautiful church was built in honor of the holy virgin and martyr Pelagia, who sacrificed herself for Christ in order to reign eternally with Christ.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR SILVANUS, BISHOP OF GAZA

At first, Silvanus was in the military service but later, driven by the power of his faith, entered into the spiritual service. Accused of converting pagans to Christianity, at first, he was cruelly tortured and, after that, was beheaded with forty other soldiers in the year 311 A.D. Thus, they all became citizens of heaven.

3. THE VENERABLE NICEPHORUS

At first, Nicephorus was a Catholic and later embraced the Orthodox Faith. He lived the life of an ascetic as a monk on Mt. Athos with the wise Theoliptos. He was a teacher of the glorious Gregory Palamas and wrote a work on mental prayer. He presented himself peacefully to the Lord in the fourteenth century. Nicephorus taught: "Gather your mind and force it to enter into the heart and remain there. When your mind is established in the heart, it should not remain empty, but allow it to continually perform this prayer: **O LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME** [THE JESUS PRAYER]! Never allow it to be silent. Because of this, the entire chain of virtues will enter into you: love, joy, peace and all others, because of which your every petition to God will be fulfilled later."

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PELAGIA

Pelagia, as an angel bright
Before the emperor stood, for trial and judgment;
Brutish looking emperor, to her spoke:
With the royal diadem, I will crown you,
Among women, be my wife!
Pelagia boldly replied:
A marriage with a heathen, I loathe
Never, O emperor, will yours I be,
To me, what do you offer? A wreath of dust!
Three wreaths have I, with the Lord,
In Christ, my eternal Bridegroom.
The first wreath - for the Faith, I kept,
The second wreath - for my virginity I preserved,
The third wreath - the wreath of martyrdom.
Do not hesitate, godless emperor,
This body of dust - crush,
Crush, cut up, burn and grind,
That the soul, for the wedding soon depart,
That soon, along side my Bridegroom, I stand
The Savior, God and Immortal.

REFLECTION

A young and inexperienced man in spiritual combat underlines his every good work by self-praise. But the experienced soldier in the midst of struggles with passions and demons minimizes his every deed and intensifies his prayer for God's help. Abba Matoes used to say: "The closer a man is to God, the more sinful he sees himself to be." He also was known to say: "When I was young, I thought perhaps that I was doing some good; and now when I am old, I see that I do not have any good deed." Did not our Lord say: "**No one is good but One, that is God**" (St. **Matthew 19:17**). Therefore, if only the one God is good and the source of all good, how can a good deed be done that is not from God? And, how can someone who does a good deed ascribe it to himself and not to God? If this is so, with what then can mortal man be praised? By nothing, except with God and the goodness of God!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the ascended Lord Jesus:

1. How, by His ascension, He manifested His Divine Nature and His Divine Might;
2. How, by His ascension into heaven, He manifests to man that there exists a better, more loftier world and life: a heavenly world and heavenly life.

HOMILY

-About idolatry as adultery-

"Judah as did Israel defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and with wood" (Jeremiah 3:9).

What sort of adultery was that which the people of Israel and Judah committed with stones and wood? It was the worshipping of idols of stone and of wood. Before this sin, they committed another sin; they turned away from worshipping the True God, the Living God and the One God. Why is their idolatry called adultery? Because, they were first bound by love for the True God, the Living God, and the One God and afterwards they betrayed this love and gave up their heart to strange idols of stone and wood. That is why the Lord calls their idolatry, adultery.

Was this reproach of God deserved only in ancient times and not in our own time; and only by Israel and Judah and not by Christians? Unfortunately, this reproach of God is completely deserving even today by many Christians. In whomever love toward the True God, the Living God and the One God has cooled off, and a lesser love enflamed toward things of stone and wood, toward decaying things and mortal creatures, that one commits adultery and that one brings down upon himself the reproach of God. Then, that reproach of God is appropriate today as it was then, for men sinned then without knowing Christ and now men sin knowing Christ.

O brethren, how long will this darkened idolatry be dragged over the earth? How long will the earth reek from the adultery of mankind with their idols of stone and wood, of silver and gold, of flesh and blood? Did not the Almighty Christ destroy all idols into dust and ashes? Why do some now stoop down and again make gods for themselves from that dust? Because of the devil's lies and their own individual self-deception.

O ascended Lord into the highest heavens, protect us from the lies of the devil and our own self-deception. Safeguard us from shameful adultery with destroyed idols by Your honorable Cross. Help us O Lord, help us that we, without ceasing, worship You the only True God, the Living God and the One God.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT FEMALE MARTYR IRENE

Irene lived in the Balkans during apostolic times in the town of Magedon. Her father Licinius was of lesser royal nobility. Some think that she was a Slav. Irene was born a pagan of pagan parents. Penelope was her pagan name. She learned about the Christian Faith from her teacher Appelianus. St. Timothy, the disciple of the Apostle Paul, baptized her and her court attendants and provided her with the epistles of the Apostle Paul to read. Refusing to marry, she enraged her father and he wanted to torture her but, in a miraculous manner, she converted her father to Christianity. Irene was subjected to various tortures by four kings, not counting her father but, God through His angels, spared her. King Sedechias buried her up to her neck in a ditch filled with snakes and scorpions but an angel of God made these venomous and repulsive creatures ineffective and saved the holy virgin from harm. King Sedechias then wanted to saw her in half but the saw rebounded from her body as from stone. After that, the same king tied her to a wheel under a water mill and released the flow of water hoping, in this manner, to kill her. But the water refused to flow, rather stood still and the virgin remained alive and well. King Sapor, the son of King Sedechias, shod her feet with nails, loaded a sack of sand on her, harnessed her and ordered that she be led like an animal far outside the town. "Truly, I am a beast before You, O Lord!" said the holy martyr, running bridled behind her torturers. However, an angel of God shook the earth and the earth opened up and swallowed her torturers. Surviving all tortures, by which she converted a countless number of pagans to Christianity, Irene entered the town of Callipolis [Gallipoli] where she preached the Faith of Christ. The local king Numerian wanted to kill her in this manner: he tossed her into three flaming hot metal oxen; one after the other. But the virgin was saved and remained alive. Many witnessed and believed. The Eparch [governor] Vaudon took her to the town of Constantina where he thought to kill her in this manner: he placed her on red-hot grates. But that did not harm St. Irene and she converted many to the True Faith. Finally, Irene arrived in the town of Mesembria where she was slain by King Sapor but God restored her to life. The king, with many of the people, upon witnessing this, believed in Christ and were baptized. Thus, St. Irene, by her suffering and miracles converted over one-hundred thousand pagans to the Faith of Christ. Finally, she lay down in a grave and ordered Appelianus to close the grave. After four days, when they opened the grave, she was not in the grave. Thus, God glorified forever the virgin and martyr Irene, who sacrificed all and endured all so that God may be glorified among men. (*)

(*) Archbishop Philaret in his "Lives of the Saints" thinks that St. Irene was of Serbian descent.

2. SAINT MARTIN AND SAINT HERACLIUS

Martin and Heraclius were both Slavs. They were persecuted by the Arian heretics in Illyria. Banished into exile, these two knights of Orthodoxy completed their earthly lives in the fourth century and took up habitation with the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT IRENE

Penelope, daughter of the king, at the balcony was,
When, in a row, three birds to her quickly flew.
The first a dove, white as milk, with an olive branch,
After that an eagle, in its bony beak, a wreath of flowers
Finally, a raven, with a bitter serpent, swooped and entered.
Penelope, asked the servants, could they recall what this means?
The servants remain silent. No one knows. With amazement, everyone is struck.
We are all mortal men, Appelianus the Elder said:
But harken to me Penelope, harken, beautiful child,
The Spirit of God, through these signs, to you clearly prophesies;
The dove, your serenity signifies, Irene you will be called,
The Grace of God you, the olive branch signifies
The eagle, the conqueror signifies, passions you will conquer,
The flowery wreath, glory and heavenly sweetness signify;
The raven with a serpent, the demon with his maliciousness, that is
But, by our endurance, overcome him, you will.
This, Irene heard all, and in her heart quivered,
And to the saving Faith decided to give herself completely;
What she decided, that she carried out and God helped her.
Through her holy prayers, O God, save even us.

REFLECTION

Prayer consisting of words alone does not help if the heart does not participate in prayer. God hears only a fervent prayer. Abba Zoilus of Thebaid was once returning from Mt. Sinai and met a monk who complained to him, that they are suffering much from drought in the monastery. Zoilus said to him: "Why don't you pray and implore God?" The monk replied: "We have prayed and have implored, but there is no rain." To this, Zoilus replied: "It is evident that you are not praying fervently. Do you want to be convinced that it is so?" Having said this, the elder raised his hands to heaven and prayed. Abundant rain fell to the earth. Seeing this, the astonished monk fell to the ground and bowed before the elder, but the elder, fearing the glory of men, quickly fled. The Lord Himself said: **"Ask and it will be given you" (St. Luke 11:9)**. In vain are mouths full of prayer if the heart is empty. God does not stand and listen to the mouth but to the heart. Let the heart be filled with prayer even though the mouth might be silent. God will hear and will receive the prayer. For God only listens to a fervent prayer.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the ascended Lord Jesus:

1. How, by His Ascension, He signified the triumphant end of His entire work on earth in the course of some thirty-three years;
2. How, by His Ascension, He teaches us that we should direct all of our aspirations toward heaven and not toward earth.

HOMILY

-About the divine marriage of the souls of men-

"Turn, O backsliding children says the Lord; for I am married to you" (Jeremiah 3:14).

The soul of man is the bride and the Living and All-powerful God is the bridegroom of the soul of man. His bride, the soul, the Lord clothes in light and nourishes it with His Grace. And the soul, from God the groom, gives birth to good children and many children in the form of many and beautiful virtuous works. The soul, on its own, cannot give birth to one virtuous work. Only the soul made fertile by God, gives birth to virtuous works. However, the soul, made fertile by the world, either remains barren or produces sin and vice. That is why the Lord speaks to men: **"I am married to you"**, so that the soul of man may know to whom it is betrothed and with whom it is wed in order that it would not stray and by adultery deaden itself and turn itself into ash.

God is a faithful groom of the human soul of men. He never betrays the bride, the soul. His love toward the soul never cools as long as the soul does not turn away from Him and does not commit adultery. But, even then, God does not abandon the soul immediately, but pursues it and returns it from the path of destruction. **"Turn O backsliding children"** the Lord then speaks to the souls of men. Repent and I will forgive you. Return and I will receive you. Penitents would know to say, how great is the mercy of God. They would be able to confirm how persistent the love of God is toward sinners, even to the last hour. God is faithful in His love and He is not swift to seek vengeance on the adulterous soul. He constantly tries to restore to the adulterous soul, the lost shame of sinning. Shame produces repentance and repentance leads to restoration and restoration leads to original love and fidelity.

O Lord, All-powerful, help us, that from your eternal love our souls may produce the good and abundant fruit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS AND LONG-SUFFERING JOB

Job was a descendant of Esau the grandson of Abraham and lived in Arabia about 2,000 years before Christ. His father's name was Zareth and his mother's name was Bosora. However, his full name was Jobab. Job was an honorable, god-fearing man and very wealthy. In the seventy-ninth year of his life, God permitted difficult temptations to befall him through Satan as it is written in detail in the Book of Job. In one day, Job lost all his enormous estates, his sons and his daughters. After that a terrible disease befell him and his entire body was covered with sores from his head to his feet and Job lay on the rubbish heap outside the town and with a piece of potsherd scrapped away the pus from his wounds. Job did not murmur against God, but patiently endured all sufferings to the end. That is why God restored his health, gave him much greater riches than that which he had before and seven sons and three daughters were born to him as many as he previously had. Job lived for a total of two-hundred forty-eight years always glorifying and praising God. Job is considered to be the model of patient endurance of every suffering which God sends upon us and Job is a proto-type of the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR BARBARUS

Barbarus was a soldier during the reign of Julian the Apostate. When the emperor's commander Bacchus led the Roman army against the Franks, Barbarus, who was secretly a Christian, was serving in the army. In battle there appeared a certain hero on the side of the Franks, similar to Goliath of old and he challenged the Romans to send one of their men to come out to do battle. Commander Bacchus advised Barbarus to go. Barbarus prayed in his heart to the Living Lord, went out and defeated that giant. As a result, the Frankish army became confused and fled. Then the commander prepared a great celebration and ordered that sacrifices be offered to the idols. During the sacrificial offerings, the commander learned that Barbarus kept himself apart. When he was asked about that, Barbarus declared that he is a Christian. The commander informed the emperor and the emperor ordered that Barbarus be subjected to the most severe tortures. But Barbarus endured all with rare courage and composure. During his tortures, many miracles were manifested and many soldiers, witnessing this, accepted the Faith of Christ. Among them was the Commander Bacchus along with Callimachus and Dionysius. All three were beheaded for the Name of Christ and, after them, Barbarus was also beheaded in the year 362 A.D. Their souls took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the Immortal King.

3. SAINT BARBARUS THE ROBBER

After having committed many crimes, Barbarus repented and at first condemned himself to crawl on all fours for three years and to eat with dogs and, second, to live twelve years in the forest without clothes, without a roof and without food except grass and leaves. He received news from the angels that his sins are forgiven. Some merchants traveling through the forest and seeing Barbarus from afar thought that it was an animal and not a man, aimed their arrows at him and pierced him. Dying, Barbarus begged them to inform the nearest priest about him. The priest arrived and buried him honorably. From his body flowed healing myrrh (oil) which cured various diseases and pains of men.

HYMN OF PRAISE

JOB, THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Tell me brother, what you are able to endure,
And how much of a man you are, I will tell you.
Job the righteous rich man and all glorious
By Satan, on a dunghill was thrown,
And with pus and sores covered,
To dogs and to men, a horrifying sight!
Whatever he had, in a day perished
Except faith and except patience.
But with the weapon of faith and patience
Job, the horrible Satan overcame.
The uneven struggle, God looked on,
To the righteous one, victory He imparted.
With victory, all other riches,
And the envious devil shamed.

REFLECTION

Abba Isaiah said of himself: "I see myself resembling a horse wandering around without a rider. Whoever finds him, sits on him and rides him to his content. When one rider dismounts the horse, another saddles him and does the same, and so with the third and so forth." This great ascetic, about whom everyone spoke with amazement that he had attained perfection, said this of himself either out of humility or from remembrance of his time of imperfection. The main thing is that these words are true in relation to every Christian who walks spiritually unbridled and unrestrained. Just as soon as one passion dismounted from him, another mounted him. Just as soon as one wearied him and left him in despair, another mounted him with deluded hope that it will make him happy. Such a man does not have a rider who would direct him to the true path without digressing to the left or to the right. The only friendly rider which should be greeted with a welcome is the holy and powerful Christian spirit.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Ascension of the Lord Jesus:

1. How He first resurrected bodily and then ascended bodily;
2. How the souls of righteous men after death first ascend into heaven while the body awaits the general resurrection, general transfiguration and general ascension.

HOMILY

-About the power that God gave to the words of the prophets-

**"Behold, I made My words in your mouth, a fire.
And this people is the wood that it shall devour!"
(Jeremiah 5:14).**

You see brethren, that the effect of the word of God is different according to different people. The word of God is like fire, in whom the righteous one rejoices, as one frozen in the cold of this world; and the word of God is like fire which burns the unrighteous one whom this material world has overly warmed. The experienced spiritual fathers have left us proof that only the Name of Jesus brings power, joy and refreshment to the faithful - and this Name consumes evil spirits as a living fire. That is the way with every word of God. With some it creates comfort, with others irritation, with some it quiets anger, with others it increases anger, with some it provokes respect with fear and with others scorn. To the healthy it is honey; to the unhealthy it is the honey of wormwood.

But, why should the people be as wood which will be consumed? For, are the people to be blamed if the godless elders and false prophets lead them astray? The people are not to blame to such a degree as their elders and false prophets but nevertheless they are to blame to a certain extent. For God also gave the people to know the right path through conscience and through the preaching of God's word and the people should not blindly follow their blind leaders when they lead them on the false paths and distance them from God and God's law. Brethren, God is Just and He knows the measure of everyone's faults, and He will not permit the illiterate and the least to suffer as much as the literate and the greatest.

O All-seeing God, save us that we neither be blind leaders nor blind followers. Strengthen our hearts that, as leaders and as followers, we will always be Your servants and only Your servants.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MAY - 7 -

1. COMMEMORATION OF THE APPEARANCE OF THE HONORABLE CROSS OVER JERUSALEM

During the reign of Emperor Constantius, the son of St. Constantine, and Cyril the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Honorable Cross appeared about 9:00 a.m. stretching out from Golgotha to above the Mount of Olives. This cross was brighter than the sun and more beautiful than the most beautiful rainbow. All the people, both believing and unbelieving, left their work and, in fear and amazement, observed this heavenly sign. Many unbelievers converted to the Faith of Christ, and so also did many Arian heretics abandon their evil heresy and returned to Orthodoxy. About this sign Patriarch Cyril wrote a letter to Emperor Constantius [337-361 A.D.] who leaned toward Arianism. This occurred on May 7, 357 A.D. Thus, even on this occasion it was demonstrated that the Christian Faith is not worldly theorizing, according to sensual understanding of man, but rather in God's power, demonstrated through numerous miracles and signs.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ACACIUS

St. Acacius was a Roman officer during the reign of Emperor Maximian. Answering for his faith in Christ at the trial he said that he inherited this devout Faith from his parents and was strengthened in it by witnessing the many miraculous healings from the relics of Christian saints. After courageously enduring great tortures in the Thracian city of Pyrrinthus, Acacius was taken to Byzantium where he endured new tortures until he was finally beheaded. He suffered honorably and took up habitation in the eternal kingdom of joy in the year 303 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE FATHERS OF GEORGIA

In the sixth century and two hundred years after St. Nina preached the Good News in Georgia, the All-Holy Mother of God appeared to John, an Antiochian ascetic, and commanded that he select twelve of his disciples and go to Georgia to strengthen the Faith of Orthodoxy. And so he did. Arriving in Georgia, these twelve missionaries were solemnly received by the prince of that country and the Catholicos Eulalius and immediately began their work with zeal. The people gathered around them in masses and they strengthened them in the Faith with great wisdom and many miracles. The head of these Christ-loving missionaries was St. John Zedazneli and the names of the others were: Abidus, Anthony, David, Zeno, Thaddeus, Jesse, Isderius, Joseph, Michael, Pyrrus, Stephen and Shio. With apostolic zeal they all confirmed the Faith of Christ in Georgia, established many monasteries and left many disciples after them. Thus, they were made worthy of glory in the heavens and power on earth.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR ACACIUS

Acacius, soldier of the King Most High
For death, Acacius prepares,
With the incense of prayer, the soul censes;
And the godless judge asks him:
Why does not Christ, the faithful redeem?
Why does He not your tormentors punish,
When, Almighty God, you call Him?
The martyr to him, meekly replies:
Great in mercy, the Lord Christ is,
And in mercy and in patience, long,
Awaits repentance, from the sinner,
And patient suffering from the faithful
If the sinners, He immediately punished
How would His mercy, He proclaim?
And the righteous, if they would not suffer
By what would they show the power of God?
And by what would they before the world shine?
The word said - the head beheaded
Into Paradise, the soul ascended.

REFLECTION

"I recognized that I was indebted more and that I was forgiven much. I was called to the priesthood from juridical and public offices and that is why I am afraid that I not be seen ungrateful if I would love less than what was forgiven me." These are the words of St. Ambrose who was unexpectedly called by God to change vocations from a secular judge to become archbishop of Christ's Church. With these words the saint demonstrated how the priestly calling is greater than the secular calling; how to the priestly vocation he comes by God's calling and how he who is called owes thanksgiving to God. The debt of thanksgiving to God, all the saints considered as their main debt. Without thanksgiving to God there can be no progress in the spiritual life. Thanksgiving to God, without ceasing, is the fruitful seed from which, if it is watered by the tears of continual repentance, a beautiful fruit blossoms - love toward God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Descent of God the Holy Spirit upon the holy apostles:

1. How the apostles stand in one mind at prayer;
2. How, suddenly, there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind.

HOMILY

-About how by sins good is being turned back from man-

"Your sins have turned back these blessings from you" (Jeremiah 5:25).

If you do not possess good in abundance, O people, that means you have sin in abundance. Your sins have turned your good from you. O people, if you wish good for yourself, reject sin and do not sin anymore and you will travel toward good, and good will come to you and good will not depart from you.

O man, if you do not have good, it means that you have sin. Good cannot dwell in the same house with sin just as light and darkness cannot exist in the same place at the same time. When light departs, darkness settles in and when the darkness departs, the light shines. Thus, sin and good can be interchanged but they cannot dwell together.

O my brethren, **"Your sins have turned back these blessings from you."** These words were not spoken by only one prophet, to one people only, rather every true prophet spoke these words to his people. False prophets flatter the sins of their people, and thus, assist them even more to turn back good from their people. The true prophets go against the sins of the people, for they go along with good and cry out against sin, in order to be able to introduce good, which is from God, in the souls of their people. If the beehive begins to smell, will the honey carrying bees enter it and deposit their honey in it? No! And when the irrational bees do not want to enter in a putrid and smoke-ridden beehive, then how will the rational Spirit of God enter a soul, putrid and smoke-ridden from sin? And the Spirit of God is the possessor and the dispenser of all good gifts.

O Lord, Holy Spirit, help Your people by Your irresistible power that they drive away sin from their soul; so that You would be able to enter inside with Your life-creating gifts.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST JOHN

The feast day of this great apostle and evangelist is celebrated on September 26. This day (May 8) commemorates the miracle which appeared at his grave. When John was over one hundred years old, he took seven of his disciples, went outside the town of Ephesus and ordered them to dig a grave in the form of a cross. After that, the elder went down into this grave and was buried. Later on, when the faithful opened John's grave, they did not find his body. On May 8 of every year, dust is raised from his grave from which the sick are healed of various diseases.

2. VENERABLE ARSENIUS THE GREAT

This glorious saint was born of a patrician family in Rome and was well educated in the secular sciences and philosophy as well as in spiritual wisdom. Abandoning all the vanity of the world, he dedicated himself to the service of the Church and was a deacon of the great church in Rome. Unmarried, withdrawn, quiet and devout, Arsenius thought to live that way his entire life. But the Providence of God directed his path in life otherwise. Emperor Theodosius took him as a tutor and teacher of his sons Arcadius and Honorius, and installed him as a senator surrounding him with great wealth, honors and luxury. But all of this burdened Arsenius' heart rather than pleasing him. It happened that Arcadius committed a wrong and for that Arsenius punished him. The offended Arcadius conceived a terrible revenge against his teacher and when Arsenius found out he changed into the clothes of a beggar, left for the seashore, boarded a boat and sailed to Egypt. When he arrived at the renowned Scete, he became a disciple of the glorious John Colobus [The Short] and dedicated himself to a life of asceticism. He considered himself dead and when someone informed him that a wealthy relative died and willed his entire estate to him, Arsenius replied: "But I died before him, how is it therefore that I could be his heir?" Withdrawn in a hermit's cell as in a tomb, throughout the entire day, he wove baskets of palm leaves, and at night, he prayed to God. He avoided men and all conversations with them. Only on feast days did he leave his cell and attend church to receive Holy Communion. In order not to become lazy, he often asked himself the question: "Arsenius, why did you come to the wilderness?" He remained in the wilderness for fifty-five years as a "desert dweller" and for that entire time was a model to the monks and a glory to monastics in general. In all, Arsenius lived one hundred years and died peacefully in the year 448 A.D. after prolonged labor and voluntarily imposing hardships upon himself and took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the Lord, Whom he loved with all his heart, all his mind and all his soul.

3. SAINT EMILIA

Emilia was the mother of Saint Basil the Great. In her youth she desired to remain a virgin for life but was forced into marriage. Emilia gave birth to nine children and so inspired them with the Spirit of Christ that five of them became Christian saints: Basil the Great, Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, Peter, Bishop of Sebaste, Macrina and Theosevia. In her old age Emilia established a convent where she lived with Macrina her daughter and where she died in the Lord on May 8, 375 A.D.

4. VENERABLE ARSENIUS THE LOVER OF LABOR

Arsenius was a monk in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. He never afforded himself any rest but continually labored. He ate food only once a day, after the setting of the sun. He lived a life of asceticism and died in the fourteenth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ARSENIUS

Glorious Arsenius, whom the world glorified,
Fleeing from glory, to himself he said,
To men and to the world, consider yourself dead,
Neither wise nor foolish words, do not speak.
For a word, at one time in life, I repented,
For silence, I have never repented.
If my heart, to God I do not bind,
To shake off the passionate life, I am not able.
If, my thoughts glorify God only
External passions will leave me.
Your time, fill with prayer and labor,
Sleep even less and labor all the more.
Arsenius the sinful, why do you stop,
Why to the wilderness did you come, I ask?
Not for the sake of idleness; but for the salvation of the soul,
Not for the sake of sleep, but for the sake of repentance.
Heal yourself quickly, and enliven the soul:
Lord have mercy! Forgive and have mercy!

RELFECTION

A monk complained to St. Arsenius that while reading Holy Scripture he does not feel, neither the power of the words read nor gentleness in his heart. To that the great saint will reply to him: "My child, just read! I heard that the sorcerers of serpents, when they cast a spell upon the serpents, the sorcerers are uttering the words, which they themselves do not understand, but the serpents hearing the spoken words sense their power and become tamed. An so, with us, when we continually hold in our mouths the words of Holy Scripture, but even though we do not feel the power of the words, evil spirits tremble and flee for they are unable to endure the words of the Holy Spirit." My child, just read! The Holy Spirit Who, through inspired men, wrote these divine words, will hear, will understand and will hasten to your assistance; and the demons will understand will sense and will flee from you. That is: He Whom you invoke for assistance will understand, and those whom you wish to drive away from yourself will understand. And both goals will be achieved.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Descent of God the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How there appeared fiery tongues over the apostles, one on each of them;
2. How the apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in various tongues, as the Holy Spirit gives them utterance.

HOMILY

-About evil as the fruit of the thoughts of men-

"Hear O earth: behold I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened to my words, nor to my law, but rejected it" (Jeremiah 6:19).

Brethren, do you see where evil grows and where it ripens? Not in the bosom of God, but in the thoughts of men. Evil is sown in the thoughts of men by demonic powers or from the passions of the flesh. Evil grows in the thoughts of men and spreads and multiplies itself, blossoms and bears leaves and finally shows fruit. In due time, God warns men to break from their evil thoughts so that evil would not ripen in the souls of men and bring forth its bitter and deadly fruit. In due time, God warned Cain but he did not want to heed the warning and permitted evil thoughts against his brother to bring forth evil fruit; fraticide.

What are the thoughts of evil? All those thoughts that are contrary to the law of God; the word of God. Evil thoughts are the self-willed law of man which man prescribes for himself against God and contrary to the law of God. Therefore, if a man has resolutely decided to adhere to the law of God, evil thoughts are then as weak as shadows which quickly appear but, in the same way, quickly disappear. Then, a man is lord over his thoughts for he feels God as the Lord over himself. Then the law is the law of God and the evil thoughts of men, are nothing.

"Behold, I will bring evil upon this people," said the Lord. What kind of evil? **"The fruit of their thoughts."** That is: I will permit them only to reap that which they sowed and nurtured, for evil is neither My seed nor My harvest. The evil which I will permit upon lawless men is the fruit of their own thoughts. According to their thoughts, they should have estimated what kind of evil will befall them as a sower estimates, according to his seeds, what he will harvest.

O Lord meek and guileless, save us from our own evil which we alone, have nurtured in ourselves. We pray to You, remove the evil fruit of evil crops, and help us to pluck out the evil seed from our souls.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET ISAIAH

This great prophet was of royal lineage. Isaiah was born in Jerusalem of Amoz his father who was the brother of Amaziah, the king of Judah. By the great grace of God that was in him, Isaiah was made worthy to see the Lord Sabaoth on the throne in heaven surrounded by six-winged Seraphims who continuously sing: **"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts [Sabaoth]" (Isaiah 6:3).** Isaiah prophesied many things to individual men as well as to the people. On one occasion, he walked naked around the streets of Jerusalem for three days prophesying the imminent fall of Jerusalem by the Assyrian King Sennacherib, reminding the king and the leaders of the people not to hope in assistance from the Egyptians or Ethiopians for they, also, will be subjugated by the same Sennacherib, but rather to trust in help from God the Most High. This prophecy, as well as other prophecies, were literally fulfilled. Isaiah's most important prophecies are the ones concerning the Incarnation of God, the conception of the All-Holy Virgin, John the Forerunner and about many other events of the life of Christ. **["Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). "The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3).]** This discerning man, because of the purity of his heart and because of his zealousness toward God, also received the gift of working miracles. Thus, when the besieged Jerusalem suffered from drought, Isaiah prayed to God and water flowed from beneath Mount Zion. This water was called Siloam which means: "sent." Later, the Lord directed the man, blind from birth to bathe in this water in order for him to see. During the reign of King Manasses, when Isaiah thundered against the pagan customs of the king and the leaders comparing that generation with Sodom and Gomorrah, the anger of the leaders and the people rose up against this great prophet. He was captured, led out of Jerusalem and was sawed in half. Isaiah lived and prophesied about seven-hundred years before Christ.

2. THE TRANSLATION OF THE RELICS OF SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDER-WORKER OF MYRA IN LYCIA.

During the reign of Emperor Alexius Comnenus and Patriarch NicholasGrammaticus, the body of this saint was translated from Myra in Lycia to the town of Bari in Italy in 1007 A.D. This occurred because of the assault of the Muslims on Lycia. The saint appeared in a dream to an honorable priest in Bari and ordered that his relics be translated to this town. At that time, Bari was Orthodox and under the Orthodox Patriarch. During the translation of the relics of this saint many miracles occurred either by touching the relics or from the myrrh [oil] which abundantly flowed from his relics. **"Also on this day, is commemorated the miracle of St. Nicholas to the Serbian King, Stephan of Dechani: how St. Nicholas restored the sight to the blinded King Stephan.**

3. THE HOLY MARTYR CHRISTOPHER

Christopher was a great miracle-worker. He is especially venerated in Spain. The people pray to him primarily for protection from contagious diseases and great pestilence. He suffered for Christ and was glorified by Christ in the year 249 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT STEVEN OF DECHANI

[STEPHAN DECHANSKI]

**On the Field of Sheep, the blind Stephan sleeps
And in a dream, endures misfortune without peace.
His body shivering, his eyes bloody,
Than such a life, death is surely better,
At that moment, in a dream a man appeared to him,
In heavenly glow, in heavenly glory.
Nicholas I am, of Myra in Lycia, said he,
And, one of those whom God chooses, you are.
Into my right hand, O Stephan, look,
Behold are your eyes, preserved in it!
Without eyes you are, the eyes are with me,
To you I will give them, when the Lord wants.
Five years passed and Stephan in darkness
A strong hope has, a strong faith has:
To me, Nicholas will come once more,
With God's help; help me, he will.
Thus did Stephan, once thought in the church,
And to the beloved saint, with tears, he prayed.
And while in the chair stood, in a dream, he fell,
But behold, St. Nicholas again to him came!
Two eyes of the king in his right palm:
Behold, said he, to you, O king the day dawned!
In the name of the Lord Who, to the blind, gives sight
Look and cry out: To God be glory!
And the blind eyes, the saint touched
And darkness from the eyes as a curtain is drawn.**

REFLECTION

Every Christian can accept for himself martyrdom for the Faith, in time of persecution as well as in time of peace. Abba Athanasius says: "Be tortured by your conscience, die to sin, subdue earthly organs and you will be a martyr according to your wishes. They [the persecuted and the martyrs] fought with emperors and princes; you also have the king of sins - the devil and demonic princes. Before, there were idols, pagan temples and those who offer sacrifice to the idols. And now, they exist as thoughts in the soul. He who is a slave to debauchery worships the idol of Aphrodite. He who becomes angry and enraged worships the idol of Ares. He who is avaricious and closed to the pain and misery of his neighbor worships the idol Hermes. If you refrain from all of this and preserve yourself from passions, you have overcome idols, you have rejected an evil belief and have become a martyr for the True Faith." Therefore, a man need not especially yearn for persecution and martyrdom. Everyone can and at all times endure martyrdom for the sake of Christ and His Gospel.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Descent of God the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How all the men wonder and marvel listening to the apostles speak in different tongues;
2. How some mocked them saying: "They have had too much new wine" (Acts of the Apostles 2:13).

HOMILY

-About the curse of man who trusts in man-

"Thus says the Lord: cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:5).

When man alienates himself from God in his heart he usually trusts in men and in himself, for in who else can he otherwise trust when he untied his rowboat from God's boat? Since he has already untied his rowboat from God's boat, nothing else remains for him except to trust in his rowboat or in the rowboat of his neighbors. Weak trust, but there is no other for him! Weeping trust above the abyss of destruction, but there is no other!

But, O heaven and earth, why did man untie his rowboat from God's boat? What happened to man that he flees from his security? What kind of calculation did he calculate when he discovered it would be better for him alone on the tempestuous waves than in the household of God and near the hem of God! With whom did he make an alliance when he breached the alliance with God? Is it with someone stronger than God? Foolishness, foolishness, foolishness!

"Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings." This, God spoke once and men have repeated this thousands of times. Being disappointed in their trust in men, men have cursed thousands of times those who have trusted in man. God has said only that which men experienced only too well and confirmed by their experience, i.e., how, indeed, cursed is the man who trusts in man!

Brethren, that is why we should have trust in God Who is the stable boat on the tempest and Who does not betray. Let us have trust only in Him for all other trust is a devilish illusion. In You do we trust, O Lord, our fortress and refuge. Tie us along side You and do not allow us to untie ourselves, if we, by our foolishness and cursedness, attempt to untie ourselves from You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE SIMON, THE ZEALOT

Simon was one of the Twelve Great Apostles. He was born in Cana of Galilee. The Lord Jesus, with His mother and His disciples, came to his marriage feast. When the wine ran out, the Lord changed water into wine (**St. John 2: 1-11**). Witnessing this miracle, Simon the groom left his home, parents and bride and followed after Christ. Zealot means zealous. Simon was called the Zealot because of his great and fiery zeal for the Savior and His Gospel. After receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, Simon went to preach the Gospel in Mauritania in Africa. Because he succeeded to convert many to the Faith of Christ, Simon was tortured and finally crucified, as was his Lord, Who prepared for him a wreath of glory in the immortal kingdom.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ALPHAEUS, PHILADELPHUS AND CYPRINUS

All three were brothers and the sons of Prince Vitalis in Southern Italy. They were men of nobility and strong in faith. Condemned for their faith in Christ they were led from one judge to another; from one torturer to another. They were taken to Sicily and were slain there during the reign of Emperor Licinius. Alphaeus' tongue was severed and having shed much blood, he died. Philadelphus was burned on an iron grate and Cyprinus in fire. Their incorrupt relics were discovered in 1517 A.D. The three brothers appeared to St. Euthalia (March 2).

3. THE VENERABLE ISIDORA, FOOL FOR CHRIST

Isidora lived in the fourth century and was a nun in a convent in Tabennisi. She pretended insanity in order to conceal her virtues and her mortification. Isidora performed the most menial tasks, fed on the leftovers on the dishes, served all and everyone and was despised by all and everyone. At that time, an angel of God revealed to the great ascetic Pitirim about Isidora's secret. Pitirim came to the convent and when he saw Isidora he bowed down to the ground before her. And so, she to him. Then the sisters informed Pitirim that she was insane. "All of you are insane" replied Pitirim, "and this one is greater before the Lord than I and all of you; I only pray that God will render to me that which is intended for her at the Dreadful Judgment!" Then the sisters became ashamed and begged both Pitirim and Isidora for forgiveness. From then on, everyone began to show respect for Isidora. And she, to escape the honors of men, fled the convent to a place unknown and died about the year 365 A.D.

4. THE BLESSED THAIS

Thais was a wealthy Christian maiden in Egypt. She decided not to enter into marriage and distributed her property to the monks of the desert. When she spent all of her possessions, she began to live a life of debauchery. Learning about this, the hermits begged Abba John Colovos to come to Alexandria and he did and began to weep before Thais. When she heard that the elder was crying because of her sins, she repented in an instant, left home and everything she owned and withdrew into the wilderness with the saint. One night while Thais was sleeping and while John stood at prayer, he saw where angels descended with a great light and took the soul of Thais. John learned that her instantaneous but warm repentance was more pleasing to God than the long years of external repentance of many hermits.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE PITIRIM

In the desert, the ascetic Pitirim
Prays to God and asks himself:
In the world, is there anyone equal to me?
Then appeared, an angel of God,
Gently reproached Pitirim:
In thoughts, you magnify yourself O Elder
As though, in the world, there is no better!
Come, follow me, O Elder Pitirim,
Come, follow me to see the aged woman,
Isidora makes herself a "fool for Christ,"
To see her and then to be amazed:
She, from God her heart does not separate,
All her thoughts, to God, she binds,
And not like you, who, in the body, are here,
And thoughts, in the ends of the world!
And all of her mortifications that you see
That by shame, of the woman to be ashamed!
And the wisdom of God that you glorify
Which, in the weeds, nurses the roses!

REFLECTION

In one of his prayers, St. Ephren the Syrian turns to God with these words: "Lord, in that awesome and dreadful day You will say to us sinners: 'You men know very well what I have endured for you. What have you endured for me?' To that, what will I, a repentant, cunning, sinful and foul one respond? **The martyrs** will then point to their wounds of torture, the severed parts of their bodies and their forbearance to the end. **The ascetics** will point to their mortifications, prolonged fasts, long vigils, philanthropies, tears and their forbearance to the end. And I, slothful, sinful, lawless: to what will I point? Spare, O Lord! Spare, O Merciful One! Spare, O Lover of mankind!"

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of God the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How from the small, God the Holy Spirit makes great;
2. How He from the fearful, makes fearless.

HOMILY

-About how the righteous endures ridicule because of the words of the Lord-

"The word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day" (Jeremiah 20:8).

Who are they who reproach the prophet of God, the bearer of God's word and the bearer of the power and wisdom of God? His people reproach him and say to him: you preach to us a steep path; even if it is from God, we cannot walk upon it because for us, it is too steep.

Who are they who reproach the trumpeter of the voice of the Lord when he sounds the alarm because of fire which smokes in the distance and draws closer to the city? **The elders** of the people reproach him and say to him: why do you not keep your mouth closed; for you it would be warmer and for us a clearer sky. That which seems to you is not a fire but it is fog from the mountain dew!

Who are they who still deride the man of God when he comes from God and proclaims the will of God? He is reproached by his wife and is derided by his brethren. They say to him: you abandon your work which feeds you and you follow after someone else's work which humiliates you.

"The word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day." Thus the prophet could have said, so could the apostle, so the martyr, so every zealot of the word of the Lord and of the law of the Lord. Not one of them was frightened by reproach nor by derision, nor turned away from witnessing nor led from the road to wayward paths. The entire outside world reproached them and were sarcastic to them. But the Lord strengthened and made them inwardly joyful. The Lord overcame the world, and the saints of God overcame those who reproached and derided them.

O Lord All-good, strengthen us internally in our hearts so that the reproaches do not disturb nor the derisions, hinder us for the sake of Your Name.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT CYRIL AND SAINT METHODIUS EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES

Saints Cyril and Methodius were brothers from Thessalonica of distinguished and wealthy parents, Leo and Maria. The older brother Methodius spent ten years as an officer among the Macedonian Slavs and thus learned the Slavic language. After that Methodius withdrew to Mount Olympus and dedicated himself to the monastic life of asceticism. It was here that Cyril (Constantine) later joined him. When the Khazarite king, Kagan, requested preachers of the Faith of Christ from Emperor Michael III then, by command of the emperor, these two brothers were found and sent among the Khazars. Convincing King Kagan of the Faith of Christ, they baptized him along with a great number of his chief assistants and even a greater number of the people. After a period of time, they returned to Constantinople where they compiled the Slavonic alphabet consisting of thirty-eight letters and proceeded to translate ecclesiastical books from Greek into Slavonic. At the request of Prince Rastislav, they traveled to Moravia where they spread and established the devout Faith and multiplied books and distributed them to the priests to teach the youth. At the request of the pope, Cyril traveled to Rome where he became ill and died on February 14, 867 A.D. Then Methodius returned to Moravia and labored to strengthen the Faith of Christ among the Slavs until his death. Following his death - he died in the Lord on April 6, 885 A.D. - his disciples, THE FIVE FOLLOWERS, with St. Clement, the bishop at the head, crossed the Danube River and descended to the south into Macedonia, where from Ohrid they continued their labor among the Slavs begun by Cyril and Methodius in the north.

2. THE PRIEST-MARTYR MOCIUS [MUCIUS]

Mocius was Roman by birth and a presbyter in Amphipolis, a town in Macedonia. He suffered during the reign of Diocletian. By prayer he destroyed the statue of the god Dionysius which embittered certain pagans against him and others he converted to the Faith. He was beheaded for Christ in the year 295 A.D.

3. SAINT NICODEMUS, THE ARCHBISHOP OF PEC

This great hierarch was a Serb by birth. He lived a life of asceticism on Holy

Mt. Athos and was abbot of Hilendar Monastery. Following the death of Sava III, he was elected as the Archbishop of "All the Serbs and the Coastal Lands" in the year 1317 A.D. Nicodemus crowned King Milutin in the year 1321 A.D. He translated the Jerusalem Typikon into Serbian. [The Typikon is a book containing the rubrics (directions) for the celebration of the Divine Mysteries and other offices of the Orthodox Church.] In the introduction of this book, Nicodemus says: "Almighty God, Who knows our weaknesses, will give us spiritual strength, but only if we first display effort." He sincerely loved the ascetical life and labored to strengthen it throughout the Serbian land. He labored relentlessly to uproot the Bogomil heresy and to strengthen the Orthodox Faith. He died in the Lord in the year 1325 A.D. His miracle-working relics repose in the monastery in Pec.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT CYRIL

The Muslim leaders asked Cyril
What kind of three persons in God, were?
If God is one, from where three persons?
Our God is one, yours is three!
Cyril replies: It is not that way, it is not,
But, as the shining sun which warms at noon,
And light, warmth, its cycle has,
But a pale picture of the Divine Triade, that is,
One in essence and three divine persons
Through Christ, this truth is revealed.
Never, will a mortal man comprehend this
God Himself revealed this; this the Church teaches.

REFLECTION

In the encampment of the Saracens they asked St. Cyril: "How could Christians wage war and at the same time keep the commandment of Christ about praying to God for their enemies?" To that, St. Cyril replied: "If two commandments were written in one law and given to men for fulfilling, which man will be a better follower of the law: the one who fulfills one commandment or the one who fulfills both?" To that, the Saracens replied: "Undoubtedly, he who fulfills both commandments." St. Cyril continued: "Christ our God commands us to pray to God for those who persecute us and even to do good to them; but, He also said to us: greater love cannot be shown in this world than if one lay down his life for his friends." **"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (St. John 15:13).** That is why we bear the insults which our enemies do to us individually and we pray to God for them; and, as a society, we defend one another and give up our lives, that you would not somehow enslave our brethren, would not enslave their souls with their bodies and would not kill them in body and soul.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of God the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How from the simple, He makes wise;
2. How from the inarticulate, He makes them eloquent.

HOMILY

-About the irresistible will of God-

"I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it" (Jeremiah 20:9).

If anyone still doubts that God spoke through the prophets, let him read this confession of the great prophet Jeremiah and let him doubt no more. The prophet confesses that he had decided not to speak anymore in the Name of the Lord. Why? Because so few paid attention to his word. If anyone heeded his word the prophet endured **"reproach and derision daily" (Jeremiah 20:8).** But, when he decided to remain silent, did he, in fact, remain silent? No, he could not: **"I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it!"** He was so pressed by the irresistible power of the Spirit of God upon him to speak and he had to speak. It is, therefore, not the affair of the prophet whether he is going to speak or not: that is the affair of the All-powerful Spirit of God. The prophet is merely the chosen vessel of the All-powerful Spirit of God. All of Holy Scripture is written thusly - not according to the will of man but according to the will of God, and not according to the mind of man but according to the mind of God.

How does the word of God feel when it enters the prophet from the Spirit of God; this the great Jeremiah explains from his personal experience: **"It becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones."** That means, inspiration from the All-powerful Spirit of God. Under such irresistible internal pressure - as under the pressure of fire imprisoned in my bones - wrote the holy man of God. And many of them cried out: **"I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it anymore."** Who will go against the Spirit of God without punishment and destruction? Who will withstand Him when He wants to say something or to do something?

Only my brethren, the action of God the Holy Spirit is irresistible!

O All-powerful Spirit of God, direct us irresistibly on the path of salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT EPIPHANIUS, BISHOP OF CYPRUS

Epiphanius was a Jew by birth and, witnessing the Faith of Christ, was baptized with his sister Callithrope. At age twenty-six, he was tonsured a monk in the monastery of St. Hilarion. Later, he established a separate monastery where he became famous throughout all of Palestine and Egypt because of his asceticism, spiritual wisdom and miracle-working. Fleeing from the glory of men, Epiphanius withdrew to Egypt. Enroute, he met up with the great Paphnutius who predicted that he would become bishop on the island of Cyprus. Indeed, after many years, by the Divine Providence of God, Epiphanius arrived at Cyprus where he, unexpectedly was chosen as bishop. At the age of sixty, he became the bishop of Salamis and, as such, governed the Church of God for fifty-five years. He lived a total of one-hundred fifteen years on this earth and rested from this life so as to live eternally in the kingdom of Christ. Before his death, he was summoned to Constantinople by Emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia to an assembly of bishops which, according to the wish of the emperor and the empress, should have condemned St. John Chrysostom. Arriving in Constantinople, Epiphanius went directly to the palace of the emperor where the emperor and empress detained him for a long while trying to persuade him to declare himself against Chrysostom. The citizens and Chrysostom heard that Epiphanius agreed with the emperor against Chrysostom. That is why Chrysostom wrote him a letter: "Brother Epiphanius, I heard that you advised the emperor that I be exiled; know ye, that you will never see your throne again." To that Epiphanius replied to him: "O suffering John, withstand insults; know ye, that you will never reach the place to which you are exiled." And both prophecies of these saints were quickly fulfilled. Not wanting to agree in anyway with the emperor to the exile of Chrysostom, Epiphanius secretly boarded a boat and departed for Cyprus, but he died on the boat. The emperor banished Chrysostom into exile to Armenia. But, this saint died enroute. St. Epiphanius rested in the year 403 A.D. Among the many works of St. Epiphanius, the most famous is the Medicine Chest [Panarium] in which eighty heresies are listed and refuted.

2. SAINT HERMAN, THE PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Herman was the son of the head imperial senator who was killed by Emperor Constantine Pogonatus. This same evil emperor castrated the senator's son, Herman, and forcibly banished him to a monastery. As a monk, Herman shone like a star by his life and good works. Because of that, he was chosen as the first bishop of Cyzicus and, when Anastatius II was crowned emperor, Herman was elected as patriarch of Constantinople. As patriarch he baptized the ill-reputed Copronymos who, during the time of his baptism, soiled the water with his uncleanness. Then the patriarch prophesied that this child, when he becomes emperor, will introduce into the Holy Church some impure heresy. And this happened. When Copronymos became emperor, he restored the heresy of the iconoclasts. Leo Isaurian, the father of Copronymos, initiated the persecution of icons and when Patriarch Herman protested, the arrogant Leo cried out: "I am emperor and priest!" He removed Herman from the patriarchal throne and banished him to a monastery where this saint lived for ten more years until the Lord called him to Himself and to the heavenly kingdom in the year 740 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR PANCRAS

Pancras came to Rome from Phrygia where, as a fourteen-year-old boy, he was tortured and killed for Christ in the year 304 A.D. This saint is greatly revered in the west. In Rome, there exists a church dedicated to him and, in this church, his holy relics repose.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EPIPHANIUS

**Epiphanius, follower of Christ
By bread is fed and water drinks,
By the power of Christ, miracles he performs,
As a thunderer, heresies he destroys,
Soldier of Truth, pillar of Orthodoxy.
At death, such a testament, he leaves:
Vile thirst for money, you extinguish,
The rich man, do not ever envy,
Do not hate and do not slander,
And every heresy you avoid,
All foul thoughts, as serpents, drive away
They, from believers, make unbelievers.
A sober mind you keep, tied to God,
Booty of the devil, a sober man is not.
For me a sinner, you pray to God,
With your whole life, glorify God!**

REFLECTION

Saint Clement of Alexandria tells of a horrible custom among the barbarians. He says that when they capture their enemy, they tie him alive to the corpse of a dead man, and leave them both alone that the living and dead decay together. If only it could be said: "Thank God, that this barbarian custom is past!" In essence, it has not passed, rather, it reigns today in full force. Everyone who ties their living spirit to the flesh deadened by barbarian passions is the same as the one who ties a living man to a corpse and leaves them both to decay.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of the Holy Spirit on the apostles:

1. How from fishers of fish, He makes them fishermen of men for the kingdom of God;
2. How from shepherds of the irrational flock, He makes them shepherds of the rational flock.

HOMILY

-About how men, in prosperity do not listen to the law of God-

"I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said: 'I will not hear' " (Jeremiah 22:21).

The Lord of Hosts raised this complaint against Jehoiakim, the king of Judah and against the people of Judea. Are not these words in effect even today when they are spoken in the face of our people and almost, with few exceptions, to every one of us individually? When we feel ourselves prosperous, we leave God in the shadows and we render His words to oblivion; but as soon as misfortune encompasses us with its dark wings, we turn to God and cry out to Him for help. In misfortune, the commandments of God seem to us as sweet as honey but in prosperity, they seem as bitter as medicine. Is not then misfortune better than prosperity? Is not misfortune more salvific in which we seek God, than prosperity in which we forget God?

"O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!" (Jeremiah 22:29), cries out the true prophet of God. Man is the earth; the word of the Lord is life planted into that earth. Will the earth prefer to remain without the living crops and be cursed or will it nurse the crops entrusted to it and be blessed? O how ugly is the bare ravine and the barren field and how beautiful is the cultivated field covered with rich crops! O man, you are the one and the other field. Choose: death or life! Not one-householder values the field at all if it does not bear any kind of crop on it. Will God then be less intelligent than an ordinary householder and give some value to the field that fails to bear fruit from every seed that is sown on it?

What will become of man who, in his prosperity, does not listen to the words of God? **"And he shall be buried with the burial of an ass" (Jeremiah 22:19)**. Thus spoke the prophet to King Jehoiakim and his word was realized. When the Chaldeans captured Jerusalem, they killed Jehoiakim. They dragged his body beyond the gates of the city and left it to the dogs. And that which happens to the asses, so it was with the unheeding king. O man, O earth! Hear in time the word of the Lord that the anger of the Householder does not pour out on you as on a barren field and that your end not be as the end of an ass.

O Long-suffering Lord, save us from the stoniness of heart and darkness of mind; from those two bitter diseases, the miserable consequences of those hours of life which men call prosperous. Save and have mercy on us, the Lord of Hosts!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR GLYCERIA

Glyceria was the daughter of a Roman governor. Becoming impoverished after her father's death, Glyceria settled in Trajanopolis in Thrace. During the reign of the nefarious Emperor Antoninus, Glyceria was taken to offer sacrifices to the idol of Jupiter [Zeus]. She traced the sign of the cross on her forehead and when the Prefect Sabinus questioned her concerning her lamp, (for all of them carried lamps in their hands), Glyceria pointed to the cross on her forehead and said: "This is my lamp." As a result of her prayer lightning struck the idol and smashed it to pieces. The prefect became angry and ordered her flogged and thrown into prison. The prefect sealed the doors to the prison, determined to starve the virgin to death. However, an angel of God appeared to Glyceria and administered heavenly food to her. After a period of time, when the prefect thought that the virgin must have died from hunger, he opened the doors of the prison and was astonished when he saw her healthy, radiant and joyful. Witnessing this miracle, Laodicius, the jailer confessed Christ the Lord and was immediately beheaded. After that Glyceria was thrown into a fiery furnace but remained unharmed by the fire. Standing in the midst of the fire and, remembering the miracle of the three youths in the Babylonian furnace, Glyceria praised the Lord. Finally, she was thrown to the lions and, praying to God, this holy virgin gave up her soul to the Lord for Whom she bravely endured many tortures. She suffered honorably in the year 177 A.D. A healing oil [myrrh] emitted from her relics which healed the sick of the gravest diseases.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ALEXANDER

Alexander was a Slav. As an eighteen year old soldier in the army of Emperor Maximilian, he refused the order of the emperor to give honor to the Roman idols and for that which he was handed over to Captain Tiberian, to either counsel Alexander to deny Christ or else torture and kill him. Since all the counseling was in vain, Tiberian took Alexander with him across Macedonia to Constantinople where he traveled for duty. In every town along the way, the young Alexander was cruelly tortured but, in every town, Christians came out before him and begged him for a blessing and they encouraged him in his mortification. Pimenia, his mother, followed after him. During the course of this travel, an angel of God appeared many times to Alexander soothing his pains and encouraging him. In one place, Carasura, the martyr performed a miracle through prayer: when thirst overcame him and the soldiers who escorted him, he brought forth a well of cold water from an arid place. On the shore of the Ergina river, Tiberian ordered the executioner to behead Alexander and to toss his body into the water. When the executioner swung at the martyr's head, he saw radiant angels of God around Alexander and became frightened and his hand dropped. Alexander asked him why his hand dropped and the executioner replied that he sees some radiant young men around him. Yearning death and union with the Lord, Alexander prayed to God to withdraw the angels from him so that the executioner would not be frightened. And thus, the executioner carried out his work in the year 298 A.D. Pimenia removed the body of her son and honorably buried him. Many healings occurred at the grave of the martyr. After death, the martyr appeared to his mother and informed her of her imminent translation to the other world.

3. THE VENERABLES JOHN, EUTHYMIUS, GEORGE AND GABRIEL OF THE MONASTERY IVIRON [MT. ATHOS]

All four venerables were the founders of the famous Iberian [Georgian] monastery on the Holy Mt. Athos. At first, St. John lived a life of asceticism in the Lavra [Monastery] of Athanasius and, after that, founded his monastery, Iviron. John died in the year 998 A.D. Euthymius and George translated the Holy Scripture into the Georgian language. Euthymius died in the year 1029 A.D. and George died in 1066 A.D. Gabriel was found worthy to receive the miracle-performing Icon of the Mother of God which arrived at the monastery by way of the sea.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT GLYCERIA

Glyceria: sacrifice to the gods!
Orders the mindless judge,
Or into the fire, to be consumed you must -
Glyceria ridicules the judge
God is one; "the gods" are demons
Who confuse your mind.
What kind of sacrifice, O mindless man?
One sacrifice, was it not on Golgotha,
Awesome sacrifice, divine and bloody,
That abolished all bloody sacrifices?
One sacrifice, after that sacrifice,
One sacrifice, the Lord seeks from us:
A pure heart; a prayerful altar,
Clean hands; works of mercy,
Faith, hope and charity [love], devout
Such a sacrifice, I endeavor to offer
To the Living God, my Creator;
God, All-holy such a sacrifice desires,
Not a corpse, bloody and dead.

REFLECTION

Concerning the power of death and the power of the Cross of Christ, St. Athanasius writes: "Whose death ever drove out demons? And whose death have the demons been afraid of as the death of Christ? Where the Name of Christ is only invoked, there, every demon is driven out. Who in such a measure tamed spiritual passions in men that the prostitutes live a chaste life and murderers do not use the sword anymore and the fearful become courageous? If not the Faith of Christ? If not the sign of the Cross? And who else has so convinced men in immortality as the Cross of Christ and the resurrection of the Body of Christ? The death of the Sinless One and the Cross of the Lover of men have brought a greater and more lasting victory than all the earthly kings with many multi-millions of armies. Which army was able to defeat a single demon? Meanwhile, only the mention of the Name of the Crucified One on the Cross peels to flight the army of demons. O, if all Christians would know what treasure they have in the Name of Christ, and what kind of weapon they have in the Cross of Christ!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of God the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How the apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, travel throughout the whole world without means and without friends;
2. How they converted the rich and the poor to the Faith of Christ by their word, life and miracles alone.

HOMILY

-About how God uses the unbelievers in order to punish the believers-

"Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant" (Jeremiah 25:9).

Is not this a difficult saying? Who can be fed by it? The pagan king, the idolatrous king, the Lord call him His servant. If the servant of God is one who knows the True God and who adheres to the law of God, how then can one be a servant of God who does not know the True God and who does not adhere to the law of God? Truly, the true servant of God is he who knows the True God and who keeps the law of God but when he, to whom God has given the knowledge about Himself and His law, perverts knowing into unknowing and law into lawlessness, then God takes as His servant that ignorant one so as to punish the apostates. For, an apostate from God is worse than a pagan and an apostate from the law of God is lower than an idolater by birth.

Therefore, when **Israel**, as the ancient Church of God, alienated itself from God and the law of God, God chose Nebuchadrezzar for His servant to punish Israel, the Apostate.

Therefore, when the **Christian peoples in Asia and Africa** through numerous heresies alienated themselves from God, God took as His servant the Arabs to punish Christians in order to bring them to their senses.

And when the **Christian peoples in the Balkans** alienated themselves from God and God's law, God invited the Turks as His servants to punish the apostates that by punishment to bring them to their senses.

Whenever the faithful alienate themselves from God, God weaves a whip from the unbelievers to bring the believers to their senses. And, as the faithful consciously and willingly turn away from God, so the unbelievers unconsciously and unwillingly become servants of God; the whip of God.

But God takes the unbelievers only temporarily in His service against the believers. For the land of Nebuchadrezzar, the same Lord says, He will visit it for its lawlessness and **"make it perpetual desolations" (Jeremiah 25:12)**, then will a servant against a servant be found? For God did not take the Babylonians for a servant because of their goodness and faith, rather because of Israel's wickedness and unbelief.

O Righteous Lord, help us by Your Spirit Most-high, to always adhere to You, the One, True God and Your saving law.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR ISIDORE

During the reign of Decius, Isidore was drafted by force from the island of Chios into military service. From childhood, Isidore adhered to the Faith of Christ and spent his entire life in fasting, prayer and good works. But when in the army Isidore declared himself a Christian, the commander seized him, required of him an answer and counseled him to deny Christ and offer sacrifices to the idols. The saint replied: "Even if you kill my body, you have no authority over my soul. I possess the True, Living God, Jesus Christ Who now lives in me and after my death, He will be with me and I am in Him and will remain in Him and I will never cease to confess His Holy Name as long as my soul is in my body." First, the commander ordered that Isidore be whipped with oxen tails and after that they cut out his tongue. Even without his tongue, Isidore, by the Spirit of God, spoke and confessed the Name of Christ. Meanwhile, the punishment of God came upon the commander and he, suddenly, became mute. Finally, the mute commander gave the sign to behead Isidore. Isidore was elated at this sentence and after praising God went to the scaffold where he was beheaded in the year 251 A.D. His companion, Ammon buried his body and following that also suffered and received the martyr's wreath.

2. THE VENERABLE SERAPION, THE SINDONITE

Sindon means "linen cloth" in which the bodies of the dead were wrapped. Serapion was called the Sindonite because he covered his naked body with a single linen cloth. He carried a Book of the Gospels in his hand. Serapion lived like a bird without a roof and without any worries moving from place to place. He gave his sindon to a needy person who was shivering from the frost and remained completely naked. When someone asked him: "Serapion, who uncovered you?" He pointed to the Holy Gospels and said: "This!" After that he even gave the Book of the Gospels away as a ransom for a man in debt whose lender was threatening him with prison for this debt. Once in Athens, he did not eat anything for four days because he had nothing available and began to cry out from hunger. When the Athenian philosophers asked him why he was crying out so, Serapion replied: "I was indebted to three; two of which I have satisfied but the third one is still tormenting me. The **first lender** is carnal lust which tormented me from my youth; **the second** lender is avarice and the **third lender** is the stomach. Those two have left me, but the third one still torments me." The philosophers gave him a gold coin to purchase bread. He went to a baker, purchased only one loaf of bread, left the gold coin and departed. In his old age, he presented himself peacefully to the Lord in the fifth century.

3. BLESSED ISIDORE, "FOOL FOR CHRIST"

Isidore was a German by descent. Having come to Rostov, he fell in love with the Orthodox Faith and, not only became a communicant of the Orthodox Church, but assumed the difficult life of asceticism as a "Fool for Christ." He walked around completely in rags. Pretending insanity through his madness, he spent the entire day teaching men and at night, he spent in prayer. He spent nights in a hut made of branches which he had built in a muddy terrain. Great and awesome were the miracles which this saint performed both during life and after death. To a merchant, who was thrown from a boat and was drowning in the sea, Isidore appeared walking upon the water and led him to the shore. When the servants of the Prince of Rostov refused Isidore a glass of water that he asked for and drove him away from the door, then all the vessels with wine dried up. When Isidore died in his hut on May 14, 1484 A.D., the whole of Rostov smelled from a wonderful aroma. The merchant whom the Blessed Isidore saved from the sea, erected a church in his honor over the spot where his hut was located.

HYMN OF PRAISE

BLESSED ISIDORE, FOOL FOR CHRIST

Blessed Isidore wrestled with himself
Until passionless, as a withered tree, he became,
But even a withered tree, the bees with honey fill,
And from the dry cliff, a spring sometimes erupts.
The body of the blessed, with the Spirit filled
With the honey of Grace, the heart sweetened.
In the foolish body, the fountain of God's power,
In wretched garments, hidden treasure,
Wonderful Isidore, on the garbage heap lay,
On the streets cried out, leaped and fled,
Without roof and bread and without friends,
But under the watchful eye of his Creator
To vain men, he was an "instruction"
And to those beastly bound to the earth, a reproach;
He, by his life, as though he wanted to say:
Men, to misfortune your cares lead.
He is not fortunate, who from God steals,
But who alone possesses God as a treasure.

REFLECTION

Sin which serves as a scandal to others is a two-fold sin. A wise man strives not to scandalize anyone and does not lead anyone into sin by his sinful example. Saint Ambrose praises such sagacity of the Emperor Valentinian who died at an early age citing these examples from his life: "The emperor, hearing that he was talked about throughout Rome as a passionate hunter and a lover of wild beasts - which, in reality he was not - and how this passion was taking the emperor away from his duties of State, immediately ordered that all the wild beasts in his preserve be slain. Again, upon hearing how certain malicious people spread the rumor that he ate lunch early (wanting by this to present him as being gluttonous), the emperor imposed a strict fast on himself both privately and publicly. Before the public lunches he was rarely seen to place a morsel of food in his mouth. And again, when his sisters disputed with a certain man over some property, the emperor, even though he had the right to judge the dispute, directed the case to the open court so that he would not be accused of partiality." Indeed, with great fear, this pious emperor upheld the words of the Lord: **"Woe to him who shall offend [scandalize] one of these little ones"** (St. Matthew 18:6).

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of God the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How the Holy Spirit leads the apostles through all sorrows and tribulations, filling their hearts with consolation and joy;
2. How the Holy Spirit makes that seed of the Gospel grow and succeed which the apostles sow throughout the world, even where it seems to have been scattered in vain.

HOMILY

-About Christ as the Branch of David-

In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15)."

With these words, the holy Prophet Jeremiah prophesies the coming of the Holy Savior of the world from the lineage of David. The Branch of Righteousness is Jesus Christ Himself. These words could not have referred to anyone else, since, at the time of the coming of the Lord Jesus, a prince from the lineage of David did not sit any longer on the throne at Jerusalem but rather a foreigner, Herod the Idumean. Neither from then until today was there any other prominent branch of David, neither as a worldly ruler nor a spiritual ruler. At the time of the nativity of Christ, there were but a few people from the Tribe of David and they were unknown and impoverished. Among these were numbered the All-Holy Virgin and the righteous elder Joseph, the carpenter. It is clear therefore, that for the past thousand years since this prophecy was spoken, no other majestic branch from the lineage of David appeared, except the Lord Jesus. This becomes more clear from the following words: **"As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister to Me" (Jeremiah 33:22)**. These words could only apply to the spiritual descendants of David through Christ the Lord, i.e., upon Christians, for only the number of Christians (and not the physical descendants of David of whom there are not any at all), for these twenty centuries can be measured with the stars in the heavens and with the sand in the sea.

O my brethren, let us rejoice that even we Christians belong to this countless number of people of God; to the greatest people in the history of the world both as to numbers and as to character. Let us rejoice even more that we belong to this heavenly Branch of David Who, by His Blood redeemed us from foreigners and adopted us and made us heirs and co-heirs of the kingdom eternal. O, All-good Lord, You have redeemed us prodigal sons from the contemptible humiliation and hunger and made us sons of the kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE PACHOMIUS THE GREAT

Pachomius was born in Egypt and, in his youth, was a pagan. As a soldier, he fought in battle with Emperor Constantine against Maxentius. Following that, he learned of the One God from Christians and witnessing their devout life, Pachomius became baptized and withdrew to the Tabennisi wilderness, to the famous ascetic Palamon with whom he studied the ascetical life for ten years. Then, an angel appeared to him in the habit of a Schema [The Great Angelic Habit of a Monk] over the place called Tabennisiot and gave him a board upon which was written the Monastic Rule [Constitution] for the Cenobitic Life, ordering him to establish such a monastery in that place, prophesying to him that in this monastery many monks will come for the sake of salvation of souls. Heeding the angel of God, Pachomius began to build many cells even though at that place there was not anyone except his brother John and himself. When his brother reproached him for building unnecessary cells, Pachomius simply said to him that he is following the command of God without regard as to who will come to live there and when. But soon, many men gathered at that place moved by the Spirit of God, and began to live a life of asceticism according to the Rule of Pachomius, which he received from the angel. When the number of monks increased, Pachomius gradually established six more monasteries. The number of his disciples amounted to about seven thousand. St. Anthony is considered to be the founder of the hermitical life but St. Pachomius as founder of the monastic cenobitic way of life. The humility, love of labor and abstinence of this holy father was and remains a rare example for the imitation of the vast number of monks. St. Pachomius worked numerous miracles but endured numerous temptations from demons as well as men. He served men as a father or a brother. He inspired many to follow the path to salvation and directed many on the path to truth. He was and remains a great light of the Church and a great witness to the truth and justice of Christ. He died peacefully in the year 348 A.D. in the seventy-fourth year of his earthly life. The Church has included many of his disciples in the ranks of the saints, such as: Theodore, Job, Paphnutius, Pecusius, Athenodorus, Eponymus, Sorus, Psoi, Dionysius, Psentaesis and others.

2. SAINT ACHILLEUS, BISHOP OF LARISSA

Achilleus, this great hierarch and miracle-worker, was born in Cappadocia. He participated in the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325 A.D.] at which he shamed the heretics and, by his learning as well as by his sanctity, he commanded great astonishment. Taking a rock, St. Achilleus shouted to the Arians: "If Christ is a creation of God, as you say, then say: 'let oil flow from this rock.' " The heretics remained silent and were amazed at such a request from St. Achilleus. Then, again the saint said: "And if the Son of God is equal to the Father, as we believe, let oil flow from this rock." And, indeed oil did flow to the amazement of all. St. Achilleus died peacefully in Larissa in the year 330 A.D. When the Macedonian King Samuel conquered Thessaly he translated the relics of Achilleus to Prespa to an island in a lake which was called and even today is still called Achilleus or Ailus.

3. THE VENERABLE SILVANUS

At first, Silvanus was a comedian; impersonating all and everyone. After that, inflamed with the love of Christ, he became a disciple of St. Pachomius. "I am ready to give my life," St. Silvanus would say "only to receive forgiveness of my sins."

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE PACHOMIUS THE GREAT

With the Spirit of God, Pachomius burns,
With the angels, Pachomius speaks.
Around him, the monks swarm
All like candles, they stand before God.
One day, the knocker sounded,
The sister of the Abba, the Abba to see
Many years she saw him not,
Let him appear; why does he from her, hide himself?
The doorman to Abba, the message brings.
Abba, to him: greetings, take to her
I, my sister, every good fortune wish you
But to come to see you, I will not,
I, to the world, did bid farewell once
And, in the world, everything I renounced.
My sister, you renounce also,
Hurry sister, yourself, dedicate to God,
Except the grave, what can the world to you give?
With life, Christ will wed you.
Illusionary dreams, worldly pleasures are
Asleep with these dreams, one becomes obese.
But awakened, hungry he feels
And by a long dream, adversarily stolen,
As a hungry lion, he then roars for food,
For true bread, cry out and shout.
Christ hears all who call upon Him
And living bread, to the hungry, He gives.
That is real - the others are daydreams,
Outside Christ, there is no hoping.
The sister heard and began to weep,
The brother's counsel, she quickly obeyed.

REFLECTION

When a tyrant commits violence against the righteous out of greed, then the violence brings about one benefit and one detriment i.e., a detriment to the tyrant and a benefit to the one who violently suffered. Boris Godunov murdered Dimitri, the eight-year old crown prince in order to gain control of the throne without competition. The imperial days of Boris ended quickly and the tyrant was given over to decay and accursedness and Dimitri was proclaimed a saint. After fifteen years of lying in the grave, the body of Dimitri was exhumed and found to be uncorrupt and miracle-working. There were forty-five miraculous healings which occurred over his body. Whose, therefore, is the detriment and whose is the benefit from tyranny? If the tyrant knew, that by his tyranny, he would help his opponent to be included among the saints and that he would prepare defeat and damnation for himself, he would desist from planned violence. But a crooked-thought is the forerunner and companion of tyranny.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of God the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How, by the Holy Spirit, the apostles receive the mystical visions of the other world;
2. How, by the Holy Spirit, the apostles perceive the mysteries in the hearts of men.

HOMILY

-About the prophesied and actual destruction of the idols of Egypt-

"And the houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall burn with fire" (Jeremiah 43:13).

Who will burn them? Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon my servant, said the Lord. This prophecy came true. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt and he destroyed the houses of the false gods by fire; the idols of the Egyptians. He burned them but he did not destroy them forever. For after that came the destruction of Babylon, again according to the prophecy of the holy Prophet Jeremiah and Babylon became and, even until today, remains **"heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, an astonishment and a hissing, without an inhabitant" (Jeremiah 51:37)**. But, in a tradition which was recorded by St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, there remained the other prophecy of Jeremiah about the final destruction of the idols of Egypt: "All the idols will fall," says this prophecy, "and all that is made by hand will be destroyed at the time when the Virgin Mother comes here with the young Child born in a cave and placed in a manger." And this prophecy was preserved by the pagan priests themselves who, from the time of Jeremiah, introduced the custom of depicting the Virgin as she reclines on a bed and her young Child wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

Nebuchadnezzar, the servant by God's permission, could only have mowed evil but not pluck it out by the roots. But mowed evil, like mowed grass, grows again. When the Lord came to earth, He plucked out evil by the roots. Nebuchadnezzar, the servant, burned the temples and the idols but the temples were also rebuilt and new idols were made for they were not plucked out from the souls of men. When the Lord came and began His reign in the souls of the Egyptians, the temples and idols fell forever. So it is the same with the disobedient Jews who waged battle against God. Nebuchadnezzar, the servant, had taken them into bondage for seventy years and the offended Lord scattered them throughout the entire world where many of them find themselves in dispersion today even after two-thousand years. This scattering of the Jewish people throughout the entire world was clearly prophesied by Jeremiah. And so, time justified the prophet of God in all his words.

O All-seeing Lord, grant us that we adhere to the words of Your true prophet.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE THEODORE THE SANCTIFIED

Theodore was a disciple of St. Pachomius. He was born and raised as a pagan but as a young man came to the knowledge of the True Faith and was baptized. Learning about St. Pachomius, he secretly fled from his parent's home to Pachomius' monastery. St. Pachomius tonsured him a monk and admired him because of his unique zeal and obedience. When his mother arrived to ask him to come home, Theodore did not even want to appear before her but prayed that God would enlighten her with the truth. Indeed, not only did her son not return home, but she herself did not return home. Seeing a convent not far away which was under the spiritual direction of Pachomius' sister, she entered the convent and was tonsured a nun. After a period of time Paphnutius, Theodore's brother, also came to the monastery and was tonsured a monk. In time the bishop of Panopolis called St. Pachomius to establish a monastery for those who desired the monastic life. Pachomius took Theodore with him and entrusted him with the duty of establishing this new monastery. After the death of Pachomius, Theodore became the abbot of all Pachomius' monasteries and lived to a ripe old age. Theodore lived a life pleasing to God, directing the many monks on the road to salvation. He died peacefully and took up habitation in the kingdom of Eternal Light in the year 368 A.D.

2. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MUSA

St. Gregory the Dialogues speaks about her: she was only nine years old when, on two occasions, the All-Holy Birth-giver of God, surrounded by radiant virgins, appeared to her. When Musa expressed her desire to also be in such a radiant company of the Queen of Heaven, the Birth-giver of God said to her that, in one month, she would return to her and take her. She also instructed Musa how to live for these next thirty days. On the twenty-fifth day, Musa took to her bed. On the thirtieth day, the Holy Most-pure One appeared again calling to her in a soft voice to which Musa answered: "Behold, I am coming O Lady, behold I am coming!", and she gave up her spirit. Musa was translated from this life into life eternal in the fifth century.

3. SAINT NICHOLAS MYSTICUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Nicholas was famous because of the unusual severity of his life. When Emperor Leo the Wise married for the fourth time, the patriarch refused him entrance into the church and defrocked the priest who performed the marriage. As a result of that, the emperor deposed the patriarch and banished him to a monastery. The delegates of the Roman Pope Sergius II approved of the emperor's fourth marriage. When the emperor died, Nicholas was again restored to the patriarchal throne and called an assembly in the year 925 A.D., at which a fourth marriage for a Christian, in general, was forbidden. He died in the year 930 A.D. Nicholas is often surnamed Mysticus [The Mystic] and was a member of the emperor's secret council. At first, this saint was a high ranking courtier after which he left the vanity of the world and was tonsured a monk. He died peacefully in the year 930 A.D.

4. THE NEO-MARTYR NICHOLAS

Nicholas was born in Epiri. He was tortured by the Turks for the Faith of Christ and beheaded in Trikkala in 1617 A.D. A reliquary containing the head of this martyr is preserved today in one of the Meteora monasteries in Thessaly. He performs many miracles, heals the gravest diseases and is especially known to repel grasshoppers from fields.

5. THE VENERABLE MARTYRS OF THE MONASTERY OF ST. SABAS THE SANCTIFIED

During the reign of Emperor Heraclius, about the year 610 A.D., forty-four monks from the monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified near Jerusalem suffered for the Faith of Christ. Their heroism and sufferings were recorded by the eyewitness, St. Antiochus (December 24).

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT NICHOLAS, NEO-MARTYR

Nicholas the martyr, for Christ suffered
And by painful patience, overcame the devil;
And to deny his Savior, the hero did not want,
But glorified God as long as he had a voice;
And in his heart, he glorified Him when his voice gave out
And for greater sufferings, from his enemies begged.
Cruel as wolves, the Turks beat him,
Every inhuman suffering, they put him through.
And finally, his holy head, they beheaded.
Into the green grass, the head rolled,
The saint's head, with light radiated;
And a Christian in silk, wraps this head
And in church he brought it, for many, to be a remedy,
The disfigured to heal, the blind and the insane.
On all sides, God punished the unbelievers,
And the faithful Nicholas, eternally glorified.

REFLECTION

When Theodore the Sanctified was in Panopolis with St. Pachomius, his spiritual father, a philosopher came to him and offered to debate with him about the Faith. The philosopher then posed these three questions to Theodore: "Who was not born, but died?" "Who was born and did not die?" "Who died and did not decay?" To these questions, St. Theodore replied: "Adam was not born and died. Enoch was born and did not die. Lot's wife died and did not decay." And the saint added this advice to the philosopher: "Heed our sound advice; depart from these useless questions and scholastic syllogisms; draw near to Christ Whom we are serving and you will receive forgiveness of sins." The philosopher became mute from such a pointed answer and being ashamed, he departed. From this, the enormous difference is clearly seen between a pagan philosopher and a Christian saint. The one [the philosopher] loses himself in abstractions, in cleverly twisted words, in logical provocations and in thoughtful sport while the other [the saint] directed his whole mind on the Living God and on the salvation of his soul. The one is abstract and dead, while the other is practical and alive.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles:

1. How the Holy Spirit miraculously guides the feet of the apostles to distant lands;
2. How the Holy Spirit assembles them in Jerusalem from distant lands for the burial of the All-holy Birth-giver of God.

HOMILY

-About the appearance of the prophet Jeremiah from the other world-

"This done, in like manner there appeared a man with gray hairs and exceeding glorious, who was of a wonderful and excellent majesty. Then Onias answered, saying, This is a lover of the brethren, who prays much for the people and for the holy city, to wit, Jeremiah the prophet of God" (2 Maccabees 15:13-14).

This was the vision which was seen by the courageous Judas Maccabees. The first to appear to him from the other world was Onias the high priest and after that the holy Prophet Jeremiah. Just as Moses and Elijah were seen in glory by the apostles on Mt. Tabor, thus, at one time Judas Maccabees saw the Prophet Jeremiah in glory. Not even before the resurrected Christ did God the Merciful leave men without proof of life after death. In Christian times, however, those proofs are without number and without end. Whoever, even after all of this, doubts in life after death, that one stands under the curse of his sin as under his grave stone. As inanimate things cannot see the light of day, so neither can he see who doubts life which is and to which there is no end.

But, behold with what kind of glory is the Prophet Jeremiah wedded in the other life! **"Gray hairs and exceeding glorious."** Around him a certain indescribable dignity, a certain bright aureole, a certain inexpressible pleasure and beauty. He who was dragged and beaten by men to whom he communicated and imparted the will of God and who was a captive in prison and a martyr in a fetid hole and who was ridiculed as folly and was tried as a traitor and finally, as a transgressor, was stoned to death. However, one is the judgment of sinners, another is the judgment of God. The most humiliated among men became wedded with angelic glory before God.

And yet behold how heaven calls one, whom the earth called false, a traitor and a transgressor! **"Lover of the brethren"** this is how heaven called him. **"Lover of the brethren"** who prays much for the people. Finally, see how the saints in heaven pray to God for us! Not sleeping, they are praying for us while we are asleep; not eating, they are praying for us while we are eating and have over-eaten; not sinning, they are praying for us while we are sinning. O brethren, let us be ashamed before so many of our sincere friends. Let us be ashamed, let us be ashamed of so many prayers for us by the saints and let us join with their prayers. O Lord All-wonderful, forgive us our sinful slothfulness and dullness.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE ANDRONICUS

Andronicus was one of the Seventy Apostles. He was a kinsman of St. Paul, as Paul himself writes: "**Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me**" (Romans 16:7). Paul also mentions St. Junia, assistant of Andronicus. Andronicus was installed as bishop in Pannonia, but did not remain in one place, rather preached the Gospel throughout Pannonia. With St. Junia, he succeeded in converting many to Christ and destroyed many idolatrous temples. They both possessed the power of Grace to work miracles through which they drove out demons from men and healed every type of disease and illness. They both suffered for Christ and thus received the two-fold wreath: the apostolic wreath and the martyr's wreath. Their holy relics were discovered in the regions of Eugenius (February 22).

2. THE HOLY MARTYR SOLOCHON

Solochon was an Egyptian by birth and a Roman soldier under Commander Campanus during the reign of the nefarious Emperor Maximian. When the directive from the emperor was handed down that all the soldiers must offer up sacrifices to the idols, Solochon declared himself a Christian. Two of his companions also declared themselves Christians: Pamphamir and Pamphylon. The commander ordered that they be flogged and cruelly tortured from which Saints Pamphamir and Pamphylon died. Solochon remained alive and was subjected to new tortures. The commander ordered the soldiers to open his mouth with a sword and to pour the sacrifices of the idols into his mouth. The martyr broke the iron sword with his teeth and did not consume the foul sacrifice of the idols. Finally, they pierced a quill through both ears and left him to die. The Christians removed the martyr and brought him to the home of a widow where he gradually, by food and drink, became a little stronger and, again, continued to counsel the faithful to be persistent in their faith and in their sufferings for the Faith. Following that, he gave thanks to God, completed his earthly life and presented himself to the Lord in the kingdom of heaven in the year 298 A.D.

3. SAINT STEPHEN, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Stephen was the son of Emperor Basil the Macedonian and brother of Emperor Leo the Wise. He succeeded to the patriarchal throne after Photius and governed the Church of God from 889-893 A.D. He died peacefully and presented himself to the Lord Whom he greatly loved.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE APOSTLES ANDRONICUS AND SAINT JUNIA

The Apostle Andronicus, a kinsman of St. Paul,
A preacher of peace and spiritual health,
For Christ burned, a flaming love
And throughout the world, carried the illuminating teaching;
Without much clothing, without pay and care,
Only rich in the power of the Divine Spirit.
With St. Junia, all tortures he shared
Until, throughout Pannonia, the cross he carried!
There, darkness vanished where the honorable Cross glowed,
Separated the wheat without chaff and straw.
Awakened men from animalistic sleep.
And the gift of God's adoption, embraced
As weak reeds, the idols they destroyed,
Discord and odious vices, they abandoned,
When the heart begins to sob, the mouth sang:
We are Your children, O Heavenly Father!
The light from Your apostle, we now receive,
Forgive us, that slaves to the idols we were.

REFLECTION

Following a terrible earthquake in Antioch, St. John Chrysostom spoke to the people: "Great are the fruits of an earthquake. Behold the Man-loving Lord Who quakes the city and strengthens the soul, Who sways the foundation and strengthens the thoughts, Who shows the weakness of the city and makes the will of the people powerful! Turn your attention to His love for mankind: He sways for a while - and strengthens forever; earthquake - for two days, but the devotion should remain for all times; you were sorrowful for a short time - but strengthened forever. A mother, wanting to wean her child from of the habit of frequent crying, strongly rocks its little crib not in order to harm it, but to frighten it. Precisely, thus the Lord of all, Who holds the universe in His hands shakes it, not in order to destroy it, but rather to bring back those men to salvation who live lawlessly." Behold this is how the Holy Fathers, the pillars of the Universal Church, knew how to explain God's love for man, both assaults in the same way as good works, and misfortune the same way as fortune. Let us who are slow to give thanks to God be ashamed when He gives and quick in our murmuring toward him when He takes away.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of God the Holy Spirit upon the holy martyrs for the Faith:

1. How the Holy Spirit gives them wisdom to speak before judges;
2. How the Holy Spirit gives them courage to die on the scaffold.

HOMILY

-About the Holy Spirit the Comforter-

"But the Comforter the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you" (St. John 14:26).

What practical meaning do these words have, if not that it is necessary that we pray daily that the Holy Spirit be sent to us just as we pray every day for our daily bread? God is willing to send us the Holy Spirit every day but He seeks that we pray daily for the Holy Spirit. For as, in regard to bread which is, at one time abundant and at another time scarce, so it is also in regard to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us and departs from us, according to our zealotness and our slothfulness in prayer, according to our good deeds and our patience. That is the reason why the Church established that morning services begin with an invocation of the Holy Spirit: **"O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Come!"**, and after that comes the prayer: **"give us our daily bread!"** Why? Because, without the Holy Spirit, we do not even know how to use bread as it should be used for our salvation.

"He shall teach you all things." That is: every day and every night, according to the conditions and circumstances in which you will find yourself in, He will direct you, counsel you, teach you what you should think, what you should say and what you should do. For that reason, implore from God only the Holy Spirit and all else He Himself will bring with Him all that you will need at that particular moment. When the Holy Spirit shall descend upon you, you will know all, understand all and you will be capable of all that is necessary.

"And bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said to you." That is: do not be afraid that you will forget my teaching and my words. The Holy Spirit also knows all that I know so when He will be present in you all My teaching will be present in you, together with Him.

O Lord, Holy Spirit deign to descend upon us not according to our merits but according to the merits of the Lord Jesus and according to Your infinite goodness.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR THEODOTUS AND THE SEVEN MAIDEN MARTYRS: THECUSA, ALEXANDRA, CLAUDIA, FALINA, EUPHRASIA, MATRONA AND JULIA

Theodotus was married and an innkeeper in Ancyra during the reign of Diocletian. Although married, he lived according to the word of the apostle: "**Let those having wives act as not having them**" (1 Corinthians 7:29). He maintained the inn in order to unsuspectedly help Christians. His inn was a shelter of the persecuted faithful. Theodotus secretly sent help to those Christians who fled to the mountains and secretly gathered the bodies of those who died and buried them. At that time, seven maidens were brought to trial and tortured for Christ, ridiculed and finally drowned in a lake. One of them, St. Thecusa appeared in a dream to Theodotus and told to him to remove their bodies from the lake and bury them. In the darkness of night, Theodotus, with a companion, went out to fulfill the wish of the martyr and, led by an angel of God, succeeded to locate all seven bodies and bury them. But this companion betrayed Theodotus to the judge and the judge subjected him to cruel tortures. Theodotus endured all sufferings as though he were in someone else's body keeping his whole mind engrossed in the Lord. When the torturer transformed his entire body into wounds and knocked out his teeth with a stone, he ordered him to be beheaded. When he was led to the scaffold, many Christians wept for him and

St. Theodotus said to them: "Brethren, do not weep for me but glorify our Lord Jesus Christ Who helped me to complete this mortification and to overcome my enemy." Having said this, he placed his head on the block under the sword and was beheaded in the year 303 A.D. A priest honorably buried this martyr's body on a hill outside the town. Later on, a church was built on this spot in the name of St. Theodotus.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS PETER, DIONYSIUS, ANDREW, PAUL AND CHRISTINA

Peter, a handsome young man; Dionysius, a distinguished man; Andrew and Paul, soldiers; and Christina, a sixteen year old virgin, all courageously confessed Christ the Lord and endured sufferings and death for His Name. Nicomachus, who along with them was tortured, denied Christ in the middle of his tortures and, instantly lost his mind and, as a mad man, bit his body and threw up foam from his mouth until he died. This occurred in the year 250 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS HERACLIUS, PAULINUS AND BENEDIMUS

All three were Athenians. They suffered for the Faith during the reign of Decius. For the Name of Christ, they were burned in a fiery furnace.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THEODOTUS

Near Ancyra, on a hill green,
There, a group of persecuted Christians
With a blessing, lunch they ate.
What the sun is, among the shining stars,
In this group, that Theodotus was,
And next to him, the presbyter Fronto.
And Theodotus to Fronto speaks:
For a church, this spot is suitable
Over the relics of martyrs honorable!
Fronto to Theodotus replies:
You endeavor, most wonderful man,
Relics of the martyrs, obtain for us,
A church, we will easily build,
This place, with a church to adorn.
Theodotus, the all-wonderful smiled,
From his right hand, a ring he removes,
And to the honorable Fronto gives it,
And these words, to him he speaks:
My honorable word I give you and, the ring, a pledge
Relics will I soon procure
And on this spot to place them!
This Theodotus prophesying said:
His own suffering, was prophesying,
And for Christ, his martyrdom,
As he said, so it happened.
There, his relics were placed,
And over them, a church was built,
Of immortal victory, a wonderful memory
Near Ancyra, on a hill green.

REFLECTION

To conceal your virtues and mortifications was the custom of ascetics, both female and male, not only in the earliest times of Christianity but throughout all ages to the present time. Eudocia, wife of the glorious Prince Dimitri of Don, the liberator of Russia from the Tartars, was left a comparatively young widow in the year 1389 A.D. Imbued with devoutness, this princess built many churches, distributed alms and secretly weakened her body by fasting and long vigils. She wore an iron chain around her body. Meanwhile, she always appeared happy before the public, clothed in opulence and adorned with pearls. The public said many things about her and they began to spread rumors about her immoral life. Her sons heard about this and, insulted and embittered openly informed their mother what was being rumored about her. The mother opened her luxurious robe and the children, with great horror, viewed her body which was completely withered, dried up and drawn in by the iron chains.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the action of God the Holy Spirit upon the martyrs:

1. How the Holy Spirit extends them comfort in sufferings;
2. How occasionally, according to His pleasure, make their bodies unscathed by fire.

HOMILY

-About the testimony of the Spirit of God-

**"The Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father,
He will testify to Me" (St John 15:26).**

God's Son sent God the Holy Spirit into the world to testify about Him until the end of time. **"He will testify to Me."**

How will God the Spirit testify about God the Son? God the Spirit will testify in many ways:

By attracting the souls of men to Christ's Church;

By revealing to them the meaning of the Holy Scripture;

By leading their minds to the commandments of Christ;

By giving warmth, freshness, power and gentleness to the words of Christ;

By converting repentant sinners into righteous ones;

By fulfilling all the promises and prophecies of Christ upon men and upon nations and upon God's Church;

By strengthening the Church of Christ and holding it firm against all the tempest of times and all the evils of Hades and men throughout the ages of ages.

The Spirit which works in these and many other similar ways is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, Good, Life creating and All-powerful.

Not one of Christ's words goes against the Spirit of God nor does the Spirit of God go against a single word of Christ. That is why when the Spirit of God pleases to enter into the heart of man, He becomes alive and becomes a true witness to all that Christ said and did. Then, man believes joyfully and unwaveringly. For how would he not believe the greatest and the most enduring Eyewitness and Participator of all the words, all the miracles and all the works of Christ?

That is why, brethren, let us pray before all and above all that this Eyewitness and Participator, the Holy Spirit and All-powerful, settle in our hearts so that our faith may become alive, unwavering and joy-creating. O God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, come and abide in us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

MAY - 19 -

1. THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR PATRICK [PATRICIOS], BISHOP OF BRUSSA ALONG WITH THREE PRESBYTERS: ACACIUS, MENANDER AND POLYENUS

They suffered for the Faith of Christ during the reign of Julian the Apostate in Asian Brussa. Junius, the imperial deputy, brought these saints to a hot spring and asked Patrick: "Who created these curative waters if not our gods Aesculapius and others whom we worship?" St. Patrick replied: "Your gods are demons and these waters, as everything else, were created by Christ the Lord, our God." Then the deputy asked: "And will your Christ save you if I toss you into this boiling water?" The saint replied: "If He wants. He is able to preserve me whole and unharmed, even though I desire that in these waters I become separated from this temporary life to live with Christ eternally; but let His Holy will be done on me, without which not even a hair does not fall from the head of men!" Hearing this, the deputy ordered that Patrick be tossed into the boiling water. Drops of boiling water splashed on all sides and bitterly scalded many of those present but the saint of God, on whose lips were continually in prayer, remained unharmed as though he were standing in cold water. Seeing this, the deputy became enraged out of embarrassment and ordered Patrick and his remaining three presbyters be beheaded with an ax. Then the innocent followers of Christ recited their prayers and placed their heads under the ax of the executioner. When they were beheaded, their joyful souls ascended into the illuminating kingdom of Christ to reign forever.

2. SAINT JOHN, BISHOP OF THE GOTHES

John was a bishop in Georgia but when the Kahn of the Tartars in Georgia began to torture Christians, he left for four years to live among the Goths in Bessarabia. The diocese of the Goths was established during the reign of Constantine the Great. Learning of the death of the Kahn, John returned to his duties in Georgia and guided his flock zealously and devoutly. Before his death, he said: "In about forty days, I go to be judged with the Kahn," i.e., through death, John goes to the throne of God. And so it happened, on the fortieth day he died and went to the Lord. He died peacefully in the eighth century.

3. THE HOLY PRINCE JOHN [IVAN] VOLOGDA

John was a miracle-worker, god-fearing and virtuous from his youth. He was cast into prison by his uncle, Prince John [Ivan] Vasilevitch, along with his brother Dimitri where they remained for thirty-two years. Before his death, John was tonsured a monk and received the name Ignatius.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE SAINTLY PRINCES IVAN [JOHN] AND DIMITRI OF VOLOGDA

In the dark dungeon, Prince Ivan languishes
With his brother Dimitri, and his brother he counsels:
O brother, sorrow not; with sorrow, yourself do not weary,
A dungeon is to the faithful, what a royal court is,
Nor, about our uncle, speak ill,
That, without fault, into dungeon he cast us.
Without God's will, is it possible that it could be
In the darkness to enslave two of God's creatures?
If only about himself, our uncle cares,
About us, to save our souls, God cares.
The unreasonable, only his benefit seeks,
Even the despised, God eases with gifts.
Of the dungeon, the merciful God is not afraid -
Prefers to be with captives, than with the proud to stand.
Do not be angry my brother, uncle, do not reproach,
Between us, only God the truth knows.
The uncle by one path, and us with another path saves.
Worship God, to God be glory!

REFLECTION

The great hierarchs, the pillars of the Orthodox Church, knew how to blend meekness and resoluteness into their character. Meekness toward the righteous and penitents and resoluteness toward the unrepentant criminals. One Sunday, following the Divine Liturgy, the Tsar Ivan the Terrible approached Metropolitan Philip to receive the metropolitan's blessing. The metropolitan pretended not to see the Tsar and gazed at the icon of the Savior. The Tsar's adjutant approached the metropolitan and said to him: "Your Eminence, the Ruler is before you, bless him." The metropolitan looked at the Tsar and said: "O Tsar, fear the judgment of God. Here, we offer up the Unbloody Sacrifice to God and outside the sanctuary, the blood of Christians is being spilled. How many innocent suffer? You are lofty on the throne but, nevertheless, you are a man." The enraged Tsar reminded the metropolitan to keep silent, but the metropolitan said to him: "Where is my faith, if I remain silent?" When the Tsar began to threaten the metropolitan he quietly replied: "I am a visitor and guest on earth and am ready to suffer for the truth!" After a period of time, the evil Tsar strangled the metropolitan but did not strangle the saint.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate God the Holy Spirit as the Inspirer of wisdom and truth:

1. How He inspired with wisdom and truth the prophets, evangelists and apostles who wrote the Holy Scriptures by His inspiration and guidance;
2. How He inspired with wisdom and truth the Holy Fathers who interpreted Holy Scriptures by His inspiration and guidance.

HOMILY

-About the holy men of God-

"Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

This is witnessed by the Apostle Peter who himself was a holy man of God, a rock of faith and a knight of the Cross. As a holy man of God he, by his own personal experience, explains how the holy men of God spoke and what they said and he says: **"They spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."** However, they did not speak according to their own reasoning nor according to their own memory nor according to their own speculation nor according to their own eloquence but rather they spoke from the Spirit and according to the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of God flowed through them and the truth of God was revealed through them. Holy Scripture was not written with **"the false pen of the scribes" (Jeremiah 8:8)**, but was written by the servants and the chosen ones of the Holy Spirit of God. Neither was Holy Scripture written by men whose writing was a vocation, but rather it was written by the saints of God, directed and compelled by the Spirit of God. Often, not even wanting and, at times even protesting, they had to write as the Holy Prophet Jeremiah witnesses saying: **"I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His Name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9).**

O my brethren, Sacred Scripture is not of men but of God; it is not of the earth but rather from heaven; neither is it from the body but from the Spirit; yes, from the Holy Spirit of God. Inspired by the wisdom and truth of the Holy Spirit, these holy men of God wrote: Prophets, Evangelists, Apostles, Fathers, Teachers, Hierarchs and Shepherds.

O God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom and Truth, inspire us by Your Life-creating breath, that we may recognize Wisdom and Truth and by Your help to fulfill them.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR THALELAEUS

Thalelaeus was born in Lebanon. His father was called Berucius and his mother was called Romila. Thalelaeus was an eighteen-year old youth, handsome of countenance, physically tall and with reddish yellow hair. He was a physician by profession. He suffered for Christ during the reign of Numerian. When he bravely confessed his faith in Christ the Lord before his tormenting judge, the judge ordered the two executioners, Alexander and Asterius, to bore through his knees with a drill, to thread a rope through the perforated bones and to hang him from a tree. But God through an invisible power, took away the sight of the executioners. In place of Thalelaeus they bored through a board and hung it from a tree. When the judge-torturer found out, he thought that the executioners did this intentionally and ordered them both to be flogged. Then Alexander and Asterius, in the midst of their flogging, cried out: "The Lord is alive to us and, from now on, we are also becoming Christians. We believe in Christ and suffer for Him." Upon hearing this, the judge-torturer ordered that both be beheaded. Then the judge took the drill to bore the knees of Thalelaeus himself but his hands became paralyzed and he begged Thalelaeus to save him, which the innocent martyr of Christ did, with the help of prayer. Following that, Thalelaeus was thrown into water but appeared alive before his tormentor (for Thalelaeus prayed to God inwardly to prolong his sufferings that he not die immediately). When he was thrown before wild beasts, they licked his feet and were amiable toward him. Finally, Thalelaeus was beheaded and took up his habitation in life eternal in the year 284 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ASCLAS

Asclas suffered in the town of Antinoe in Egypt during the reign of Diocletian. He was flogged, scraped, burned with candles but he remained unwavering in the Faith to the end. When the tormentor Arrian was crossing the Nile by boat Asclas, through prayer, stopped the boat in the middle of the river and would not allow it to move until Arrian wrote that he believes in Christ as the One and Almighty God. But, ascribing this miracle to a magical skill of Asclas, the tormentor forgot what he wrote and continued to torment the man of God. Finally, they tied a stone around his neck and tossed him into the Nile river. On the third day Christians found the body of Asclas along the shore with the stone around his neck (as the martyr foretold them before his death) and honorably buried him in the year 287 A.D. Leonides, the holy martyr, also suffered with him. Arrian, their tormentor, later repented, believed in Christ with his whole heart and openly began to express his faith before the pagans. The pagans also killed him and so Arrian, a one-time tormentor of Christians, was made worthy of the martyr's wreath for Christ.

3. THE VENERABLE STEPHAN OF PIPERI

This saint was born into the Niksich clan in the village of Zupa of poor but devout parents, Radoje and Jacima. According to tradition, he first lived a life of asceticism in the monastery of Moraca where he was abbot. The Turks drove him out of Moraca and he settled in Rovacki, Turmanj in the place which today is called Celishte. Later, he settled in Piperi in a cell where he remained in labor and god-pleasing asceticism until his death. He died peacefully in the Lord on May 20, 1697 A.D. His relics repose there even today and with many miracles they glorify Christ the God and Stephan, God's chosen one.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR THALELAEUS

Attention, men and angels,
In suffering and at the moment of death
Thalelaeus, to God, prayed:
O Lord, Creator of the world,
Yours is the mercy, Yours is the vengeance!
To You, I pray; prolong my life,
That for You, more pain I may endure.
In truth, little, have I endured,
In order to merit Your kingdom.
Horrible, Your sufferings on Golgotha,
Horrible sufferings for You, Sinless One!
To the sinners, more horrible they should be,
Through torturing, in order to cleanse oneself
And salvation, worthily receive.
What most wonderful Thalelaeus prayed for,
What he prayed for, God granted,
His petitions were dear,
God, on him, permitted sufferings abundant,
To the end, Thalelaeus endured all
All, with joy and with thanksgiving,
All from suffering to suffering he walked,
As from celebration, to an even greater celebration,
Thus, the saint glorifies Orthodoxy!

REFLECTION

When a man acquires a Christian conscience, he zealously labors to correct his life and to please God. For him, all else becomes of little importance. We have examples of such men not only among the great ascetics and spiritual fathers but also among powerful rulers themselves. Emperor Theodosius the Great gives us such an example who, for a brief time, fell into heresy after which he repented. St. Ambrose, his earlier critic, spoke over his lifeless body: "I loved this man who, divesting himself of all imperial insignias, openly in church bewailing his sin and, with sighs and tears, begged forgiveness. What ordinary men are ashamed to do, the emperor was not ashamed to do. After his glorious victory over the enemies of the empire, he decided not to approach Holy Communion until the return of his sons only because his enemies were slain in battle."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate God the Holy Spirit as an Inspirer of meekness and gentleness:

1. How He inspired meekness and gentleness to the ascetics and hermits throughout the ages;
2. How He inspired and, even today, inspires meekness and gentleness to all truly repentant souls.

HOMILY

-About the spirit of the world and the Spirit from God-

"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God" (1Corinthians 2:12).

Brethren, the spirit of this world is the spirit of pride and cruelty and the Spirit of God is the Spirit of meekness and gentleness. The apostle of God asserts that the followers of Christ did not receive the spirit of this world rather the Spirit "**which is of God**" i.e., who proceeds from God the Father as a sweet-smelling fragrance as from flowers and as a good fragrance pours out on the soul of man making it mighty, bright, peaceful, thankful and pleasant.

Men by nature are meek and gentle. St. Tertulain writes: "the soul of man by nature is Christian." But, by the spirit of this world, it is irritable and enraged. The spirit of this world made wolves out of lambs, while the Spirit Who is from God makes lambs out of wolves.

The apostle still adds that we received the Spirit of God "**that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God**" (1 Corinthians 2:12). Therefore, that we may know what is from God in us and what is not from God and that we may sense the sweetness of that which is from God and the bitterness from that which is not from God, rather from the spirit of this world. As long as man is outside of his nature, beneath his nature, he considers bitterness as sweetness and sweetness as bitterness. But, when by the Spirit of God he returns to his true nature, then he considers sweet as sweetness and bitter as bitterness.

Who can return man to God? Who can heal man of poisonous sinful bitterness? Who can teach him by experience to distinguish true sweetness from bitterness? No one except the Spirit Who is from God.

Therefore brethren, let us pray that God grants us His Holy Spirit as He granted the Holy Spirit to His apostles and saints. And when that Holy Spirit of God enters into us, the kingdom of God has arrived in which is all sweetness itself, only good, only light, only meekness and only gentleness.

O Holy Spirit, the Spirit of meekness and gentleness, come and abide in us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT CONSTANTINE AND EMPRESS HELENA

Constantine's parents were Emperor Constantius Chlorus and the Empress Helena. Chlorus had other children by another wife, but from Helena he had only Constantine. After his coronation Constantine fought three great battles: one, against Maxentius, a Roman tyrant; the second, against the Scythians on the Danube and the third, against the Byzantines. Before the battle with Maxentius, while Constantine was greatly concerned and in doubt about his success, a brilliant Cross appeared to him in the sky during the day, completely adorned with stars and written on the Cross were these words: **"By this Sign Conquer."** Astonished, the emperor ordered a large cross to be forged similar to the one that appeared to him and that it be carried before the army. By the power of the Cross he achieved a glorious victory over the enemy who was superior in numbers. Maxentius was drowned in the Tiber river. Immediately after that, Constantine issued the famous Edict of Milan in the year 313 A.D. to halt the persecution of Christians. Defeating the Byzantines, Constantine built a beautiful capital on the Bosphorus which from that time on was called Constantinople. Before that, however, Constantine succumbed to the dreaded disease of leprosy. As a cure, the pagan priests and physicians counseled him to bathe in the blood of slaughtered children. However, he rejected that. Then the Apostles Peter and Paul appeared to him and told him to seek out Bishop Sylvester who will cure him of this dreaded disease. The bishop instructed him in the Christian Faith, baptized him and the disease of leprosy vanished from the emperor's body. When a discord began in the Church because of the mutinous heretic Arius, the emperor convened the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, 325. A.D., where the heresy was condemned and Orthodoxy confirmed. St. Helena, the pious mother of the emperor, was very zealous for the Faith of Christ. She visited Jerusalem, discovered the Honorable Cross of the Lord, built the Church of the Resurrection on Golgotha and many other churches throughout the Holy Land. This holy woman presented herself to the Lord in her eightieth year in 327 A.D. Emperor Constantine outlived his mother by ten years. He died in Nicomedia in his sixty-fifth year in 337 A.D. His body was interred in the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Constantinople.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYR PACHOMIUS

Pachomius was born in Little Russia. The Tartars captured him in his youth and sold him to a Turkish furrier as a slave. He spent twenty-seven years in slavery in the town of Usaki in Asia Minor. He was forced to become a Muslim. He went to Mt. Athos, was tonsured a monk and spent twelve years in the monastery of St. Paul. He decided to suffer for Christ. His spiritual father, the Elder Joseph, accompanied him to Usaki where Pachomius presented himself to his former master as a Christian in the monastic habit. The Turks subjected him to tortures, threw him into prison and beheaded him on the Feast Day of the Ascension, May 8, 1730 A.D. Many miracles occurred from his blood and relics. Pachomius was buried on the island of Patmos in the Church of St. John the Theologian. Thus this Little Russian peasant became a martyr and wreath-bearer in the kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT CONSTANTINE

To Constantine, the shining Cross appeared,
Constantine saw it and glorified God.
From the Son of God, that sign was,
There is none more beautiful, than this sign.
The sign of suffering, and temporary misery
But also, the sign of final victory.
With this sign, the doer of miracles,
Constantine started out and everywhere conquered.
In the midst of pagan Rome, the Cross-persecuter,
The Cross on high he raised, the glory of the Savior.
Which for three centuries was fractured and cursed,
That, now for Rome, became great and holy!
For three centuries, the Cross was spat upon,
In the blood of the saints, the earth was bathed.
Empires and emperors, arrogant and odious,
Similar to a weak reed, were destroyed one by one,
And the sign of the Cross, upright remained
Miraculously and gloriously shone to the world.
Constantine recognized it and raised it even higher,
That is why, in the calendar, his name is written in red.

REFLECTION

We see that vice is something shameful and sinful in that it always hides and always takes upon itself the appearance of good works. St. John Chrysostom beautifully says: "Vice does not have its own particular face, but borrows the face of good works." This is why the Savior said: **"they come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (St. Matthew 7:15)**. Call a liar, a liar; a thief, a thief; a murderer, a murderer; an adulterer, an adulterer; a slanderer, a slanderer and you will infuriate them. However, call a man whatever you want: honest, honorable, unselfish, truthful, just, conscientious and you will make him light up with joy and please him. Again, according to Chrysostom, I quote: "good works are something natural in man while vice is something unnatural and false." If a man is even caught in a vice, he quickly justifies his vice by some good works; he clothes it in the garments of good works. Indeed, vice does not possess its own particular face. The same is true of the devil, the father of vices!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate God the Holy Spirit as the Inspirer of justice, peace and joy:

1. How He inspired with justice, peace and joy all the lovers of Christ's justice;
2. How He inspired and, even today inspires, with justice, peace and joy all the sufferers for Christ's justice.

HOMILY

-About the children of God-

"The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

He who has the Spirit of God in himself - only he has the witness that he is the child of God. Without the Spirit of God there is no such witness. Not even the entire universe can give this witness. The universe, alone, without the Spirit of God - what else does it witness to us other than that we are its slaves, its victims, which it unmercifully swallows? In essence, the pagans thought that also. The opponents of God today, do they not think likewise? They do think so. For indeed, it is difficult to take that thought away from man who did not recognize the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, the Witness of Heaven. The same apostle says: **"For you have not received the spirit of bondage" (Romans 8:15)**. What is this spirit of bondage? It is every other spirit except the Spirit of God, Who Christ the Lord sends to those who love Him. The spirit of bondage is the spirit of materialism, the spirit of fortune-telling, the spirit of naturalism, the spirit of pessimism, the spirit of despair, the spirit of vice. Only the Spirit of God is the All Holy Spirit of adoption and freedom.

O what happiness, O what peace, O what joy when the Spirit of God cuddles in the cleansed heart of man as a sparrow does in its nest! Then our hope opens hundreds of doors in the prison of the universe and our embrace, wider than the universe, stretches out to the One Who is greater and more merciful than the universe. To Whom? To the Father! And then we cry out: **"Abba, Father!" (Romans 8:15)**.

The witness of God, which comes through the eyes, can even lead us to doubt that we are the children of God. But, the witness which comes to us from the heart, from the Spirit of God, does not leave even the slightest doubt. God witnesses about God. What kind of doubt can there be? God the Holy Spirit caresses us in the heart of our very being. Can there be any kind of doubt there? No; for then we know and feel completely confident that God is the Father and we, the children of God. No one's servants, no one's slaves, rather the children of God.

O Lord God, Holy Spirit come abide in us and remain with us as a Witness of the Trinity and the Kingdom, as a Witness of the immortal Paradise.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR BASILISCUS

Basiliscus was a kinsman of St. Theodore Tiro. He was tortured together with Eutropius and Cleonicus. When the latter two [Eutropius and Cleonicus] were crucified, and expired (March 3), then Basiliscus was again returned to prison. At that time, there occurred a change in the emperor's deputy so that Basiliscus remained imprisoned for a long time. With tears, Basiliscus prayed that God not deprive him of a martyr's death. After lengthy prayers, the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to him, promised to fulfill his wish and sent him to his village to bid farewell to his mother and brothers. At that time Agrippa, a new deputy, was appointed and ordered that Basiliscus be brought from the village immediately. Enroute from the village to the town of Amasea the Lord, through His martyr, worked a great miracle and, as a result, many people believed in Christ. Agrippa ordered the martyr to offer a sacrifice to the idol Apollyon. Basiliscus said: "Apollyon means 'one who kills - the destroyer,' " and with fervent prayer turned the idol into dust and with a heavenly fire burned the temple. The frightened Agrippa attributed this to magic and ordered Basiliscus beheaded. At that moment, Agrippa went insane and, in his madness, went to the scaffold, found a little blood of the martyr in the dust, placed it under his belt and he was healed. Coming to his senses he was baptized. Later on, Marinus, a citizen of Comana, the place of the execution of Basiliscus, built a church over the relics of the saint where many afflicted people found healing.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR JOHN VLADIMIR, KING OF SERBIA

John Vladimir was of princely lineage from Zahumlje. His grandfather was called Hvalimir and his father Petrislav. As a ruler, he was wise, merciful, meek, chaste and brave. He fervently prayed to God and voluntarily built churches and supported them. However, he had difficult struggles both internally and externally. Internally, from heretics and the Bogomils and externally from Tsar Samuel and Tsar Basil who wanted to conquer him. Samuel deceitfully captured him and cast him into prison. While he languished in prison an angel of God appeared to him and foretold that he would shortly be freed, but that he would die a martyr's death. Getting to know him better, Samuel grew to like him and gave his daughter Kosara to be his wife. When Samuel died, his son Radomir was crowned Tsar. But Vladislav, his twin brother, slew Radomir and deceitfully summoned Vladimir and beheaded him in the year 1015 A.D. The relics of this saintly king repose uncorrupt in his monastery near Elbasan and over his relics, throughout the ages and even today, numerous miracles occur. In 1925, a church was built to honor this crowned martyr adjacent to the monastery of St. Nahum since John Vladimir was the benefactor of this glorious monastery.

3. THE SECOND ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

This Council was called during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great in Constantinople in the year 381 A.D. Its goal was to confirm the Orthodox teaching concerning the Holy Spirit about Whom the Patriarch Macedonius of Constantinople erroneously taught. He erroneously taught that the Holy Spirit is God's creature and not a divine person [Hypostasis] equal to the Father and Son and One in essence with Them in the Holy Trinity. Macedonius was condemned by this Council and the teaching about the Holy Spirit was added to the Nicæan Symbol of Faith [the Nicene Creed].

4. THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS MELCHISEDEK, KING OF SALEM

Melchisedek was a contemporary of our forefather Abraham. According to the words of the Apostle Paul he was a king, priest and proto-type of the Lord Jesus Christ (**Hebrews 7**).

HYMN OF PRAISE

MELCHISEDEK, KING OF SALEM

Melchisedek, king of Salem,
Anyone of his own, did he have?
A king and a priest, he was
Of the Highest King - God
Than Abraham, he was greater,
A mystery he was and remains.
He blessed Abraham,
To him, Abraham gave a tribute.
King and priest in the world,
The proto-type of Christ, he became,
Peace and justice, he proclaimed
A mystery he was and remains.
Of him, his origin and end is unknown,
Nor the length of his earthly life,
But, that he was, it is known
Of a man, a beautiful example.
Of a man, a beautiful example,
King, saint, righteous one,
That, Melchisedek became
A prophet of Christ and proto-type.
A prophet he is, without a word,
But with a most beautiful personality;
A prophet he is, without a word,
A prophet, with righteousness and mercy.

REFLECTION

How was Moses able to fast for forty days? How were the many Christian ascetics able to live a long life in extreme abstinence from food and drink? For the physical man who does not know about the spiritual life, it is impossible to believe. It is impossible even to prove it to him for the understanding of this is achieved only by experience. When the torturers of St. Basiliscus detained him for three days without food and water and when they offered him food to eat, he refused saying that he was not hungry. "I am," says he, "filled with immortal food and do not want to receive mortal food. You are fed by earthly bread, but the heavenly word of God feeds me; wine makes you happy, and the Grace of the Holy Spirit makes me happy; meat satisfies you and fasting satisfies me; physical power strengthens you and the Cross of Christ strengthens me; gold makes you rich and the love of Christ enriches me; clothing adorns you, and good works adorn me; you are made happy with laughter and I am comforted by the Spirit through prayer." Here is a man, one out of many, and there are many more upon whom the word of the Lord is confirmed. **"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God!" (St. Matthew 4:4).**

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Baptism:

1. How that Grace cleanses man from original sin;
2. How It includes man among the citizens of the freedom of Christ.

HOMILY

-About the bodies of men as temples-

"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20).

For what, brethren, did our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit? Because, we are purchased at a price. The Lord Jesus purchased us with His cares, labors, sufferings and death. Because of this price we were made worthy to become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

But, someone will say that price was paid a long time ago and we live twenty centuries later! It is all the same: the price was not paid for one time and for one generation but rather for all times and for all generations from Adam to the Dreadful Judgment. And if there would be billions and billions of human beings born on earth, the price is paid for all of them. The price is so great and rich that if all the sand in the sea were changed into men, the price would be sufficient.

Brethren, from what moment do our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit? From the moment of our baptism. Although the price is paid for all men only those who are baptized become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Brethren, what is the consequence that the Holy Spirit lives in us? The consequence is this, that we are not our own anymore. When the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in our bodies, then He becomes the Master over us and not us over it [the body] nor over ourselves. Then, brethren, we are the possession of God the Holy Spirit.

Brethren, what does it mean at the Mystical Supper [Last Supper] when the Lord washed even the feet of Judas and when Judas received a piece of bread from the Lord, it says: **"Satan entered him" (St. John 13:27)**. O what dreadful words! O what a horrible punishment upon the traitor of God! Brethren, does that not mean that when we reject God, Who washes and feeds us, the Spirit of God departs from us and, in His place, Satan settles in? O what a stern meaning! O what a terrible reminder to all of us who are baptized! The Holy Spirit settled in us during our baptism and made us a temple for Himself. But, the Holy Spirit does not dwell in us by force but rather according to our good will. If we transgress against Him, He departs from us and in place of Him, Satan enters and our physical temple is transformed into a pigsty.

O All-good Holy Spirit do not leave us. Have mercy on us and forgive us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. ST. MICHAEL, BISHOP OF SYNNA DA

Michael, this holy and learned hierarch, dedicated himself to the service of Christ from early childhood. Together with St. Theophylact of Nicomedia, he lived a life of asceticism. At one time during a period of drought, these two saints, by their prayers, brought forth abundant rain on the earth. Because of his ascetical and chaste life from his early youth, he was chosen and consecrated bishop of Synnada by Patriarch Tarasius. He participated in the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 783 A.D.]. At the request of the emperor, he went to Caliph Harun-al-Rashid to conduct negotiations for peace. During the reign of the nefarious Leo the Armenian, Michael was removed from his episcopal throne because of his veneration of icons and was banished into exile, where in misery and poverty and, remaining faithful to Orthodoxy, died in the year 818 A.D. and took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the King.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYR MICHAEL

After the death of his parents, Michael distributed all of his goods to the poor and went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Following that, he entered the monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified where he was tonsured a monk. Michael was quite young and of a handsome countenance but, from much fasting, he appeared withered and pale. At that time, the Arabs ruled Jerusalem. One day Michael was sent by his spiritual father to the city to sell his handiworks. He was met on the streets by the eunuch of the Arabian queen who brought him to her to display his handiworks. When the queen saw this handsome monk she became inflamed with unclean passion and proposed carnal sin to the monk as once did the wife of Potiphar to the chaste Joseph. When Michael rejected the impure offer and began to flee, the angry queen ordered that he be beaten with canes and after that brought him to the king with the charge that he blasphemed the faith of Muhammad. The king proposed that Michael embrace the Islamic faith, but he refused. He was then given a potent poison to drink. Michael drank the poison but nothing happened to him. Then the king ordered Michael to be beheaded in the center of Jerusalem. Monks discovered his body and removed it to the monastery of St. Sabas where they honorably buried him. St. Michael suffered for Christ and was glorified in the ninth century.

3. THE VENERABLE FEMALE EUPHROSYNE, PRINCESS OF POLOTSK

Euphrosyne was the daughter of Prince Vseslav of Poltsk. When her parents wanted to betroth her, she fled to a convent and was tonsured a nun. An angel of the Lord appeared to her three times and revealed to her where she must establish a new convent for virgins. She even attracted her sister Eudocia to the monastic life and many other maidens from the ranks of the aristocracy. Her cousin, Zvenislava, by birth Princess Borisov, brought all of her riches, clothes and precious stones and said: "All the beauty of this world, I consider vanity and these adornments prepared for my marriage, I give to the Church of the Savior and I, myself, wish to be betrothed to Him in a spiritual marriage and place my head beneath His good and easy yoke." Euphrosyne also tonsured her a nun and gave her the name Eupraxia. In her old age, Euphrosyne desired to die in Jerusalem and for that she prayed to God. God heard her prayers and, indeed, when she visited Jerusalem she died there. Euphrosyne was buried in the monastery of St. Theodosius on May 23, 1173 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE MARTYR MICHAEL

The evil empress, accuses Michael,
That he, the Islamic faith, berates,
To the monk, a strange proposal, the emperor extends,
That, as a son, he will adopt him,
Only, the True Faith to abandon,
And, as a Muslim, his head to shave.
The monk, with prayer warms his heart
And to the Sultan's face, he smiles:
You think, O emperor, than me, you are stronger?
Death, for me, a new life means,
For the world, my soul cares not,
Behold, three things to you, I propose:
Either, with the Cross of true believers be baptized
Or with the bloodthirsty sword, slay me,
Or to my spiritual father, release me,
That to my monastery, I return.
With fury, the king became enraged:
With lightning speed, the head of the saint fell.
His holy soul, the angels took
And into the kingdom of Christ, conveyed it.

REFLECTION

A spiritual man interprets all things and all manifestations in nature in a spiritual and symbolic manner and, from all, draws benefit from it for his soul. At one time, the brethren came to St. John the Short [Colovos] and began to tell him how a heavy rain fell and watered the palms and how new branches began to sprout on the palms so that the monks would have enough material for their handiwork. St. John thought and said to the brethren: "In the same manner the Holy Spirit enters the hearts of the saints so that It renews itself and lets out the branches of the fear of God."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Baptism:

1. How that Grace gives power to the soul to follow Christ the Lord;
2. How It is a pledge of God's adoption of the baptized man.

HOMILY

-About how we need not grieve the Spirit of God-

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, where by you are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

Brethren, "**The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit**" is recited over all of us who are baptized by water and Spirit. The Spirit of God is given to us not because of our merits and, no one should ever think that, but according to the mercy of the Living God. Even in normal relations between men, happy is the one who gives the gift and happy is also he who receives the gift. Giving is joy on both sides. The greater the gift, the greater the joy. God rejoices when He gives the Grace of His Holy Spirit: why then should men not rejoice who receive it? The needy one who receives usually rejoices more than the rich man who gives; why then should not miserable men rejoice who receive this enormous gift from the rich God?

In what way do men grieve the Holy Spirit? The apostle who commanded that we not grieve the Spirit of God immediately adds, by what means is the Spirit grieved: "**All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking (swearing) and all malice. All of that to be put away from you**" (Ephesians 4:31), says the apostle. In other words, the Spirit of God is grieved by our every sin. Let every sin be put away from us and the Spirit of God will be joyful and by Him we will be rejoicing. When we have an important guest in our home we endeavor to do everything that is well pleasing for that guest. Can there be a greater guest than the Holy Spirit of God? Since He is our greatest and most desired guest, we need to invest the utmost effort to please Him. We know with what we please the Spirit of God - with the same, with which we please Christ the Lord. The Lord said: "**If you love me, keep my commandments**" (St. John 14:15). He who, therefore, keeps the commandments of Christ has love toward the Son and toward the Holy Spirit. He who pleases the Son, keeping His commandments, also pleases the Father and the Holy Spirit. The apostle especially recommends: "**be you kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another**" (Ephesians 4:32). If we are kind, if we are tenderhearted [merciful], if we forgive one another, by this we please the Spirit of God Who is a guest in our hearts. The Spirit of God then rejoices in us and our entire being trembles from certain inexpressible joy.

O my brethren, let us take care that we not grieve our Most High Guest Who comes to us with the richest gifts.

O God the Holy Spirit, forgive our negligence toward Your Immortal Majesty and do not leave us empty and worthless without You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE SIMEON THE STYLITE OF THE WONDERFUL MOUNTAIN

This wonderful saint Simeon was born in Antioch in the year 522 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Justin the Elder. His father perished in an earthquake and he was left alone with his mother Martha. At age six, he withdrew to the desert to a spiritual father John under whose guidance he submitted himself to a life of austere fasting and prayerful asceticism to the astonishment of all who saw him. Enduring horrible demonic temptations, he received great comfort and grace from the Lord and His angels. The Lord Christ appeared to him under the guise of a handsome youth. After this vision, a great love for Christ burned in Simeon's heart. He spent many years on a "pillar" praying to God and chanting psalms. Under God's guidance, he withdrew to a mountain named "Wonderful" by the Lord Himself. Because of the name of this mountain, Simeon was surnamed the "Man of the Wonderful Mountain." Because of his love for God, he was endowed with the rare gift of grace, by which he healed every infirmity, tamed wild beasts, discerned into distant parts of the world and the hearts of men. He left his body and gazed at the heavens and conversed with angels, frightened and cast out demons, prophesied, at times lived without sleep for thirty days and even longer without food and received nourishment from the hands of angels. The words of the Lord were completely fulfilled in him: **"He that believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do"** (St. John 14:12). In the year of our Lord 596 A.D. and in the seventy-fifth year of his life, St. Simeon presented himself to the Lord that he, together with the angels, may satisfy himself gazing upon the face of God.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR MELETIUS STRATELATES, ALONG WITH 1218 SOLDIERS, THEIR WIVES AND CHILDREN

Meletius was accused of demolishing a pagan temple during the reign of Emperor Antoninus. Nailed to a tree, Meletius gave up his holy soul. Many soldiers under his the command, who refused to deny Christ their Lord, suffered with him. They all honorably suffered in the eleventh century and took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the God.

3. VENERABLE NICETAS, THE STYLITE

As a youth, Nicetas lived an unrestrained and sinful life. Entering into church by chance, he heard the words of the Prophet Isaiah: **"Wash yourselves (from sin) and you will be clean"** (Isaiah 1:16). These words entered deeply into his heart and caused a complete turnabout in his life. Nicetas left his home, wife, property and entered a monastery near Pereyaslavl, where he lived an ascetical life of difficult mortifications until his death. He wrapped chains around himself and enclosed himself in a pillar for which reason he was called a Stylite. God endowed him with abundant grace so that he healed men of various tribulations. He cured Prince Michael Chernigov of palsy. Certain evil doers spotted the chains on him and, because of their brightness, thought they were made of silver. They killed him one night, removed the chains and carried them away. This occurred on May 16, 1186 A.D. After his death, he appeared to the Elder Simeon and ordered that his discovered chains be placed next to his body in the tomb.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SIMEON THE STYLITE

Glory to wonderful Simeon of the Wonderful Mountain,
Of the Most-high Creator, he was the praise.
Prayer, fasting and all night vigils
A saint he became, with powerful gifts,
With powerful gifts, God's grace.
With Grace, his labor the Lord rewarded,
In works and in deeds, powerful Grace,
Which cures diseases and demons destroys,
Which, according to the truth, every deed he judges,
And, the mysteries of heaven and men he recognizes.
From his childhood years, until his older days
A beautiful and fragrant sacrifice, he was.
His heart, the altar of the Living God was,
For the Spirit All-holy, a glowing sanctuary.
To the greatest spheres, the mind powerfully uplifted,
Where all the objects of faith, with the eyes are seen.
And, toward good his will was extended,
Mightily strengthened in God's law.
What are all riches, and all kingdoms; What are they?
As a quick spark, they glow and extinguish!
Compared to a holy man - even the whole world, what is it?
The world changes, perishes and the saint remains.
If it (the world) does not a saint produce, the world, a fig tree is
Without fruit and worth, a dead barren tree!
Glory to wonderful Simeon, of the Wonderful Mountain,
Of creation and the Creator, he was the praise.

REFLECTION

The Apostle Paul said: **"To the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15)**. Even the food of man, by itself, cannot be called impure although some food in man can provoke impure thoughts and desires in man. Concerning this, the wonderful St. Simeon the Stylite reflects on a conversation with his Elder John. John the Elder said: "Man does not soil food and drink for the Lord says in Scripture: **'Even as the green herb have I given you all things'** " (**Genesis 9:3**). To that Blessed Simeon responded: "If man then does not soil food, nevertheless it gives birth to impure thoughts and darkens the mind and it gives root to and fattens passions and transforms the spiritual man into the physical, nailing his thoughts to earthly desires." Is not the water which falls from the clouds clean? But when too much rain falls, the crops decay from it. Likewise heavy foods provoke the decay of the spiritual and moral being of man.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Chrismation [Confirmation]:

1. How that Grace anoints the soul cleansed from original sin by baptism, with the joy of sonship;
2. How that Grace confirms man in the Faith of Christ and seals him for the kingdom of God.

HOMILY

-About how the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of men-

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Love is joy and love anoints the heart of man with joy. Brethren, love is power and love anoints the heart of man with power. Love is peace and love anoints the heart of man with peace. And from joy, power and peace, courage is born and love anoints the heart of man with courage.

The love of God, as a fragrant oil, is shed abroad in our hearts by no other than the Holy Spirit, the All-gentle and All-powerful Spirit. Completely undeserved by us, the Spirit of God is shed abroad in us: the love of God in our hearts in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Chrismation. However, in time we neglect this love and by sin we alienate ourselves from God and fall into the disease of spiritual paralysis. And the Holy Spirit unwilling to abide in an impure vessel, distances Himself from our heart. When the Holy Spirit distances Himself from us, then joy, power, peace and courage also departs from us immediately. We become sorrowful, weakened, disturbed and fearful. But the All-good Spirit of God only distances Himself from us but does not abandon us completely. He does not abandon us but He offers to us who are sick, remedies through the Mystery of Repentance and the Mystery of Holy Communion. When we again cleanse ourselves through the Mysteries [Sacraments] of Repentance and Communion then He, the Holy Spirit of God, again abides in us and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. We fall, we rise, we fall and we rise! When we fall, the Spirit of God stands by us and raises us if we desire to be raised. However, when we are raised, the Spirit of God stands within us all until we, by sin and foolishness, do not desire to fall. Thus, we in this life interchangeably become a fertile field and a wilderness, sons of repentance and prodigal sons, fullness and emptiness, light and darkness.

O All-good Holy Spirit of God, do not depart from us either when we want You and when we do not want You. Be with us all the time until our death and save us for life eternal.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE THIRD FINDING OF THE HEAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

In the eighth century, during the bitter violence of iconoclasm, the head of St. John was brought to Comana, the place of exile of St. John Chrysostom. When iconoclasm ended in the year 850 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Michael and the Patriarch Ignatius, the honorable head of St. John was translated to Constantinople and there was placed in the chapel of the imperial court.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR THERAPONTUS, BISHOP OF CYPRUS

Therapontus was a monk and an ascetic on the island of Cyprus. He was found worthy of the episcopal rank, but during the time of the persecution of Christians, he was found worthy of an even greater wreath, the crown of martyrdom. His body reposed in a church on Cyprus. When, during the reign of Emperor Nicephorus in the year 806 A.D., the island of Cyprus was attacked by the Hagarenes, the saint appeared to the sexton of that church and told him that the infidels will attack Cyprus and ordered him to remove his relics to Constantinople. The sexton did this immediately. While the boat was traveling on the sea with the reliquary, a great storm arose but the sea was calm around the boat and a sweet-smelling fragrance emitted around the entire boat in all directions. The sexton opened the reliquary and everyone witnessed that it was filled with myrrh [oil] which flowed from the saint's relics. By rubbing themselves with this oil, many of the sick were healed. A church was built in Constantinople over the relics of this miracle-worker, who continued to grant healing to all those who with faith touched them. By the Grace of God, the gravest illness of possession, of cancer, of hemorrhaging, of insanity, of blindness, of barrenness and of various other maladies were cured by the relics of St. Therapontus.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS PASICRATES, VALENTIAN, JULIUS AND OTHERS

They were all Roman soldiers. They all suffered for Christ in Macedonian Dorostol about the year 302 A.D. When Pansicrates' brother Papian, who apostatized from Christ because of fear, began to persuade him to deny Christ and remain alive, St. Pansicrates answered him: "Depart from me, you are not my brother!" Pansicrates and Valentian were beheaded together. At the trial, St. Julius said: "I am a veteran; for twenty-six years I have faithfully served the emperor and since I was faithful to a lesser one, how can I not be faithful to a greater one?" i.e., to the Heavenly King. After that, Nicander was brought before Maximus the Perfect. Nicander's wife encouraged her husband to die for Christ. "Foolish old woman" Maximus said to her angrily, "You just want a better husband." The woman answered him: "If you think that of me, give the order and let them kill me now before my husband!" Marcian was also slain with Nicander. Marcian's wife approached the scaffold carrying her son in her arms. Marcian kissed his son and prayed to God: "O All-powerful Lord, You take care of him!" Following that, they were beheaded and were translated into the kingdom of Christ. (*)

(*) Philaret thinks that all of these martyrs were Slavs. Refer to: " **The Saints of the Southern Slavs.**"

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THERAPONTUS

Blessed Therapontus, for Christ suffered,
Two heavenly wreaths, for that he received:
As a hierarch of the Church and courageous martyr;
Still, as a flower unfaded, his body remained,
The sick to heal, and the world to aromatize,
The unfortunate to comfort, the faithful to rejoice.
That, the Lord glorified His glorifier,
Of his rational flock, wonderful shepherd.
And that, the Lord made, that it be known and voiced about,
That a forceful death, does not the saint kill,
But with a wreath crowned him and his name proclaimed
Eternally glorified in both churches.
God's glorifier, Therapontus holy,
And wonderful martyr for Holy Faith,
Help us also for the love of God
By your prayers, before the throne most high!

REFLECTION

Some misguided men think more about the end of the world than the end of their lives even though it is obvious that for him to whom the end of his life comes the end of the world has come. A brother standing before St. Seraphim of Sarov continually kept in his mind how he was going to ask the saint about the end of the world. St. Seraphim discerned his thought and said to him: "My joy! You think highly of the wretched Seraphim. How could I know when the end of the world will be and that great day when the Lord will judge the living and the dead and render to each one according to his deeds will be? No, no, this is impossible for me to know!" And when the saints did not know how will the sinners know? Why should we know, that which the Savior Himself did not find beneficial to reveal to us? It is much better to think that our death will come sooner than the end of the world rather than the end of the world before our death.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Repentance and Confession:

1. How that Grace, when it touches the heart of the penitent, the penitent sees all the ugliness of his sin and, through tears, washes them away;
2. How that Grace, when the penitent confesses, enters into man as joy into the sorrowful one, as hope into the hopeless one.

HOMILY

-About the nearness of the Judge-

"Behold, the Judge stands before the door" (St. James 5:9).

Brethren, in one day, you can gain all eternity. And in one day, brethren, you can lose all eternity. You are given thousands of days on earth to determine your own personal eternal salvation or for your own personal eternal damnation. But blessed be a hundred-fold that day in which you repent of all your unclean deeds, unclean thoughts and return to God crying out for mercy! That day will be worth more to you than a thousand other days.

What kind of day is that blessed day? That is a day of self-condemnation. When that day dawns a man who, thus far, judged the entire world, looks all at once and sees himself as the greatest stain on God's world. He becomes ashamed before God, becomes ashamed before every man and becomes ashamed before every created thing of God in the world. Shame begins to burn him as fire. Then he recognizes and confesses: truly, I am the greatest blot in God's world! Truly, all men are better than I! Truly, all things are more pure than I! I am blacker than burned wood and I, until now, thought that I was white! I am uglier than the frogs and, until now, I thought that I was as beautiful as an angel! Lord, Lord, Lord, have mercy on me a sinner and wash me from the mud of sin, so that I can, as much as possible, begin to resemble Your creation!

Brother, do not wait, do not wait for that blessed day of repentance comes by itself. You alone brother, seize firmly the first day that comes to meet you and say: "You are that, my blessed day, by which I will purchase life eternal!" Do not wait, brethren do not wait for **"Behold, the Judge stands before the door!"** That Judge is the Living Lord Who also created you and, until now, has seen and numbered all of your transgressions. In a day or two, He can draw you to the judgment where you will not have, not even a word of justification. Seize the day! Seize the day of repentance! Seize the day before death has seized you! **"Behold, the Judge stands before the door!"**

O Lord, awesome and just, prolong the days of the sinner until he repents.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE CARPUS

Carpus was one of the Seventy Apostles. He was a follower and companion of the Apostle Paul by whom he was appointed as bishop of Varna in Thrace. He also preached the Gospel on Crete where he received St. Dionysius the Areopagite in his home. St. Dionysius testifies that Carpus was a man with an exceptionally pure mind, meekness and innocence and that the Lord Jesus, with His angels, appeared to him in a vision and that he never began the Divine Liturgy that he did not have a heavenly vision beforehand. Enduring many assaults for the Name of Christ, he finally suffered at the hands of the unbelieving Jews and was killed and, with his soul, took up habitation in the kingdom of God to delight eternally gazing upon the Lord in glory.

2. THE HOLY APOSTLE ALPHAEUS

Alphaeus was the father of two apostles from among the Twelve: James, the son of Alphaeus and Matthew, the Evangelist. He ended his earthly life peacefully.

3. THE VENERABLE JOHN OF PSYCHAITA

At an early age, he withdrew from the world to the Lavra [monastery] of Psychaita in Constantinople. Here he lived a life of asceticism for many years for the sake of the love of Christ. Because of the veneration of icons, he endured banishment in the eighth century.

4. THE NEO-MARTYR ALEXANDER OF THESSALONICA

This martyr of Christ was born in Thessalonica at the time of the great tyranny of the Turks over this city. As a young man, he was deceived by the Turks and became a Muslim. In the beginning, he did not have any pangs of conscience for such an act and he departed on a pilgrimage with other Muslims and became a dervish. But, as a dervish in Thessalonica, he began to repent bitterly. During his repentance, the thought came to him that he, in no way, can wash away the horrible sin of apostasy from Christ except through his own blood. Therefore, when he repented and decided in favor of martyrdom, he declared himself a Christian before the Turks. The Turks cast him into prison and subjected him to various tortures. But, Alexander only cried out: "I was born a Christian and as a Christian I want to die." Finally, the Turks condemned him to death for which the repentant Alexander greatly rejoiced, recognizing from this condemnation that his sins were forgiven and that God accepted his sacrifice. Alexander was beheaded in Smyrna in the year 1794 A.D., and was glorified in both the heavenly and the earthly Church.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLES

The Holy Apostles, a company small,
With heavenly light, illumined the world.
On the wings of the Spirit, covered the world,
That with the same wings, they would gift to the world.
To palaces, shacks and mountains, they went,
Crossed the sea and on the road [they] perspired;
For them each day, a new battle and suffering was,
Wrestling with the world, battle without moaning.
Each day different, but the thought the same,
Thought on Christ and the vision of Christ.
What sort of day it will be, to them it was all the same,
Either in a palace or in prison to spend the night
Just to uphold Christ, in themselves,
And with Him to quickly cover the earth.
Whatever kind of lunch or dinner, it was all the same,
Only that the Faith, throughout the world shines.
Honors or blows, to them it is all the same,
Only that Christ, over the world reigns.
Over them, winged angels hover
And, as to their own brothers, they rejoiced in them.
Apostles holy, sons of God
Pillars of the Church on the foundation of Christ,
Even now, they labor and build up the Church
Although as suns, in heaven they shine.

REFLECTION

We should not desire the death of a sinner, but his repentance. Nothing grieves the Lord more, Who suffered on the Cross for sinners, then when we pray to Him for the death of a sinner and thereby to remove him from our path. It happened that the Apostle Carpus lost his patience and began to pray that God send down death upon two sinful men; one a pagan and the other an apostate from the Faith. Then the Lord Christ Himself appeared to Carpus and said: "Strike me; I am prepared to be crucified again for the salvation of mankind." St. Carpus related this event to St. Dionysius the Areopagite and he wrote it down and gave it to the Church as a lesson to all, that prayers are needed for sinners to be saved and not for them to be destroyed, **"for the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).**

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Holy Communion:

1. How that Grace enlivens the bread and wine;
2. How It changes them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

HOMILY

-About the Grace of God-

"My Grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The Lord did not even spare His apostles from temptations. That is why He gave them Grace! When Satan himself began to malign the Apostle Paul, Paul prayed to God that Satan depart from him. To that, the Lord replied: **"My Grace is sufficient for you!"** That is, if you need to withstand Satan, for your endurance **"My Grace is sufficient for you!"** If you need to struggle with Satan, again **"My Grace is sufficient for you!"** If you wish to defeat Satan, again **"My Grace is sufficient for you!"** Grace is an all-inclusive weapon. Grace is stronger than all opposition, than all assaults, than all the powers of darkness. Grace is invincible and victorious.

Brethren, that is why we should pray to the Lord to give us His All-powerful Grace. Grace is God within us. Grace is the kingdom of God within us. When the Grace of God is within us, then day is within our souls. And day signifies light, knowledge and fearlessness.

Brethren, we cannot here on earth implore a greater good from God than the Grace of God. If we were to receive the entire universe as a gift, that gift would be less than the Grace of God.

O most abundant Lord, the inexhaustible source of the omnipotent Grace, sprinkle our hardened hearts with Your Grace that we might weep before Your most great goodness and our horrendous ingratitude.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR THERAPONTUS, BISHOP OF SARDIS

Therapontus converted many Hellenes [Greeks] to the Faith of Christ and for that he was cruelly tortured by the pagans through starvation, imprisonment and flogging. Naked, they placed him on the ground and tied him to four dry stumps and whipped him unmercifully until his flesh was ripped from his bones. But the martyr remained alive and those four stumps turned green and grew into tall trees from which many who were ill received healing. Finally, St. Therapontus was slaughtered like a lamb during the reign of Valerian about 259 A.D. and with his soul took up habitation in the kingdom to behold the glory of God in eternity. He suffered honorably in the year 259 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS THEODORA AND DIDYMUS

During the reign of the nefarious Emperor Maximilian there lived in Alexandria a virgin Theodora, of noble descent and upbringing. As a Christian, Theodora was brought to trial before the pagans. After a prolonged period of torture for the Faith of Christ, the prince-torturer ordered that she be brought to a place of ill repute and permitted the soldiers to enter and to approach her for the satisfaction of their carnal passions. St. Theodora fervently prayed to God to save her from defilement and while she was praying, a soldier by the name of Didymus came to her and told her that he also is a servant of Christ, dressed her in his military attire and he, in her female attire. Then, he permitted her to leave and he remained in the house of ill repute. Later, he was arrested, brought to trial, admitted that he is a Christian, that he saved Theodora and that he is ready to die for Christ. Didymus was sentenced to death and led to the scaffold. Theodora ran up to him and cried out: "Even though you saved my honor, I did not ask you to save me from death. Yield to me, a martyr's death!"

St. Didymus said to her: "My beloved sister, do not prevent me to die for Christ and, by my blood, to wash away my sins!" Hearing this discussion, the pagans sentenced them both to death and both were beheaded and their bodies incinerated. They honorably suffered and both obtained the wreath of eternal glory in the year 304 A.D. at Alexandria.

3. SAINT DAVID OF GARESJA

David was one of the thirteen fathers of Georgia commemorated on May 7. He was called Garesja because of the wilderness near Tiflis where he lived the ascetical life [from the Georgian gare, 'outside' and jdoma, 'to sit']. In his old age, David decided to visit the Holy Land with a few of his disciples. He entrusted the care of the monastery to the Elders Lucian and Dodo and began his journey. When they arrived at a hill from which Jerusalem was visible, David began to weep and said: "How can I be so bold as to walk in the footsteps of the God-man with my sinful feet?" David then told his disciples that they, being more worthy, go to worship at the holy shrines, and he took three stones and began to return. But the Lord would not allow such humility to be hidden from the world and an angel appeared to Elijah the Patriarch of Jerusalem and said to him: "Immediately send for the elder who is returning to Syria. In his possession are three stones. He took with him all the grace of the Holy Land: for him one stone is sufficient for a blessing and the other two should be returned to Jerusalem. That elder is Abba David of Garesja." The patriarch immediately sent men who caught up with the Elder David, took the two stones and released him. That third stone remains, even today, on his tomb and possesses the miraculous power of healing.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT DIDYMUS AND SAINT THEODORA

Didymus beautiful, to his death went
And joyfully chanted psalms.
When the young Theodora, this heard,
From the city, hurried after Didymus,
With Didymus she debated
And about death, with him was vying:
O Didymus, O my benefactor,
Let them first kill me!
You, my virgin's honor saved
But from me, took the martyr's wreath.
O Didymus, yours the honor and glory,
But this death, let it be mine!
Remove yourself, let me the sword behead!
To that, Didymus to Theodora said:
Theodora virgin, sister of mine,
Here is the fortune about which I have always dreamed!
Here the opportunity for Christ to die,
For you it is enough that a virgin pure you are,
You the Lord serve in purity,
Give to Didymus, God to repay!
His counsel, Theodora does not accept,
Before Didymus, hurries ahead to death.
And a head for beheading, have I,
And I, a soul in need of salvation!
This debate, O most beautiful!
About death, O blessed competition!
But both, one sword can behead:
Twice like lightning, beheaded both
With the heavenly hosts, now numbered
With their prayers, helping us.

REFLECTION

Bodily health is undoubtedly a gift from God. But bodily health is, by no means, the greatest good of this world as many people speak and write about. For whatever kind of bodily health it is, it is transitory; and that which is transitory cannot be called the greatest blessing for man. Intransient values are more precious than transient values, as eternity is more precious than time. Intransient values enter into the framework of the health of the soul. Father John of Cronstadt writes: "Oh, I myself feel, that when I am completely healthy and, when by labor do not exhaust myself, then I am dying in the spirit and there is no kingdom of God within me, then my body controls me and the devil controls the body."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Holy Communion:

1. How that Grace makes the consecrated bread and wine a living sacrifice of Christ;
2. How It acts within the bread and wine in the same way as It acted within the body of the All-pure One [The Theotokos] at the time of the Incarnation of the Lord.

HOMILY

-About the Grace of God revealed throughout the ages-

"That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His Grace" (Ephesians 2:7).

With the prophetic gift, the Apostle Paul prophesied about the riches of the Grace which, throughout the ages, will be poured out on the generations of mankind. We who live nearly twenty centuries separated from the apostle can attest to that which the apostle prophesied in ages past. Just as beehives are filled with valuable and honey-bearing bees, so all the centuries from Christ until today are filled with praiseworthy men, virgins and women.

O how abundantly the richness of the Grace of God manifested itself on countless souls who, at first, were sinful and later became holy!

O how abundantly the richness of the Grace of God manifested itself on men and women who were, at first, weak and fearful and after that heroically confessed Christ the Lord and joyfully suffered for Him!

O how abundantly the richness of the Grace of God manifested itself throughout the centuries on the simple and illiterate who, after that, became true wisemen and spiritual generals of the faithful armies of Christ!

Brethren, just think how much more hidden holiness, unrevealed sacrificing, unrecorded heroism, unsung virtues lay hidden in the depths of twenty centuries of Christianity! When all of that is made known, all that which was in the past centuries and in those centuries which will come until the end of time, then will the angels and men be astonished before the unspeakable riches of the Grace of God. Then the Apostle Paul himself will have to cry out: "Even though I was an apostle, nevertheless, my word was too weak to express all the immeasurable richness of the Grace of God which, out of love for man, was proclaimed in the world."

O Most Holy Trinity, our mankind-loving God, uplift our hearts that we continually glorify and praise the exceeding great richness of Your Grace.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT NICETAS, CONFESSOR AND BISHOP OF CHALCEDON

In his youth, he renounced the world and withdrew to a life of monastic asceticism. Shining with virtues as the sun, he was noticed by the elders of the Church and was elevated to the episcopal throne of Chalcedon. As a bishop, he was especially merciful toward the less fortunate and greatly concerned himself about orphans, widows and the poor. When the evil Leo the Armenian rose up against icons Nicetas courageously stood up in defense of icons denouncing the emperor and explaining the meaning of icons. Consequently, he endured great humiliation, calumny and imprisonment. Finally, he was banished into exile for his confession of faith and in his labors and sufferings presented himself to the Lord to receive the wreath of glory in the kingdom of God.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR HELICONIS

Heliconis was born in Thessalonica and was educated in Christian piety. During the reign of Gordian and Philip, she moved to Corinth where she openly denounced all those who offered sacrifices to the idols. When Perinus the mayor counseled her to offer a sacrifice to the idol Aesculapius, this martyr of Christ said to him: "Hear me, I am a handmaiden of Christ and who Aesculapius is, I do not know. Do with me what you will." For this, she was brought to trial and endured terrible tortures. She was cast into fire and much blood poured from her body which extinguished the fire and she remained alive. She was cast before lions but the lions did not touch her but fawned around her. Admitted into the temple, allegedly to offer sacrifices to the idols, she destroyed the idols, and by this, embittered the torturer even more. Lying wounded in prison, the Lord Himself appeared to her with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. He healed her wounds, comforted and strengthened her. After that she was led to the scaffold to be beheaded. Before her beheading, Heliconis raised her arms high and prayed that God receive her and unite her with His lambs in the heavenly enclosure. When she completed her prayer, a voice was heard from heaven: "Come daughter, a wreath and a throne is prepared for you!" Finally, she was beheaded and received the wreath of glory from God to Whom, out of love, she sacrificed herself as an innocent and pure lamb.

3. SAINT IGNATIUS OF ROSTOV

As a hierarch, he governed the flock of Christ for twenty-six years with great love and compassion. When he died and as his body was being placed in church, some of those who were present witnessed as his body rose from the coffin into the air above the church and from the heights, he blessed the people and the town. Afterward his body returned to his coffin. Many other miracles appeared over his grave. He presented himself to the Lord on May 28, 1288 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT HELICONIS

Heliconis, courageous martyr,
Pure of soul, most beautiful countenance,
In Corinth, the city of idols
Proclaimed the word about the only God
Corinthians, by darkness deceived,
In demonical bonds, tied
You worship all and all things
But, not the One God Most High!
God is One, the idols are many,
God is One, the devils are many.
One God is the Creator, the Omnipotent,
Of all creation, the good Provider,
He created all, He sustains all
To everything living, He gave the breath of life,
He moves everything with power and wisdom,
Caresses all with divine mercy.
He is the Lord of earth and heaven,
Him only we should worship.
Corinthians wealthy and glorious
Why, in the faith, are you such a nothing?

REFLECTION

Only a proud man is always prepared to equate Christ with other great men. Even though it is obvious at first glance, that great men are one thing and the Lord Christ another, just as creation is one thing and the Creator is another. Christ is not only great but He is the Creator and Source and Inspirer of every true greatness in the history of mankind. Napoleon, one of the transient great men in exile and misery on the island of St. Helena, uttered these words: "Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, Louis XIV, with all their genius, are nothing. They have conquered the world and were unable to gain one friend. And behold, Christ calls and instantly entire generations are united in a bond closer and stronger than the bond of blood. Christ ignites the fire of love which consumes all egoism and surpasses whatever kind of love you desire."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Holy Matrimony:

1. How that Grace, during marriage, lawfully sanctifies the physical bond of two human beings for the sake of the procreation of children;
2. How It unites, illumines and strengthens, through love, the union of two souls: husband and wife.

HOMILY

-About the power of the Mystery [Sacrament] of Matrimony-

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

It is God's will that the human race multiply; it is God's artful manner how the human race is being multiplied. It is God's mystery how man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife. To leave your parents does not mean to abandon your parents but rather to become parents yourself. When children become parents, they are no longer only children, but are companions of their parents. When wedded sons learn of the mystery and pain of childbirth, they then respect their parents even more. The marital union can never free a man from having respect and obedience toward his parents. The original commandment of God to honor your parents must be fulfilled. But, according to the natural cycle of things, a man leaves his parents and becomes a parent himself; he becomes a founder of a new future while his parents depart, having completed their role in the world. However, everything is not in "leaving" the parents. By a certain incomprehensible mystery, man clings to his wife and detaches himself from his parents. St. Theodoretus writes: "Christ Himself left his Father on high and united Himself to the Church."

My brethren, matrimony is a great and miraculous mystery, one of the greatest mysteries of God's plan. A pure and honorable marriage is overly replete with sublimeless. A pure and honorable marriage, in the fear of God, is a vessel of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Whoever disdains marriage disdains the Spirit of God. Whoever defiles marriage with impurity, blasphemes against the Spirit of God. Whoever abstains from marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God must, in a different manner, prepare himself as a vessel of the Holy Spirit and, in the spiritual realm, make himself fruitful in order not to be cut down as the barren fig tree.

O God, Holy Spirit Almighty, assist those who are in the state of matrimony, that in purity, fear and mutual love be as the Church of God in which You joyfully abide and govern all things for good.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

The commemoration and praise of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council is held on the Sunday before Pentecost or on the Seventh Sunday after Easter. This Council was held in Nicaea in the year 325 A.D. during the reign of the saintly Emperor Constantine the Great. This Council was convened to eliminate the confusion which Arius, a priest of Alexandria, had created by his false teaching. Namely, he spread the teaching that Christ was created in time by God and that He is not the pre-eternal Son of God, equal in being [essence] with God the Father. Three hundred and eighteen Holy Fathers participated in this Council. The Council condemned the teaching of Arius and Arius, since he refused to repent, was anathematized. The Council finally confirmed the Symbol of Faith [The Creed], which was later augmented at the Second Ecumenical Council [381 A.D.]. Many distinguished saints were present at the First Ecumenical Council among whom the most notable were: St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia, St. Spyridon, St. Athanasius,

St. Acillus, St. Paphnutius, St. James of Nisibis, Macarius of Jerusalem, Alexander of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Eusebius of Caesarea, Metrophanes of Constantinople, John of Persia, Aristarchus of Armenia and many others from the East. From the West, the following were present: Hosius of Cordova, Theophilus the Goth, Cecilianus of Carthage and others. The most important work of this Council was the confirmation of the Symbol of Faith [The Creed]. The Council also established the time of the celebration of the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ [Pascha] and issued twenty various canons.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR THEODOSIA OF TYRE

Once, during the reign of Emperor Maximian, many Christians stood bound before the praetor(*) in Palestinian Caesarea. The pious virgin Theodosia approached, comforted and encouraged them in their martyrdom. Upon hearing what she was saying, the soldiers also led her before the judge. The enraged judge ordered that a stone be hung around her neck and tossed her into the depths of the sea. But angels of God carried her to the shore alive. When she, again, appeared before the judge, he ordered her beheaded. The following night, Theodosia appeared to her parents completely encompassed in a great heavenly light, surrounded by many other virgins who were also saved and said: "Do you see how great is the glory and grace of my Christ which you wanted to deprive me of?" She said that to her parents because they tried to persuade her from confessing Christ and martyrdom. Theodosia suffered honorably and was glorified in the year 308 A.D.

(*) An elected magistrate in ancient Rome ranking below a consul charged with the administration of civil justice.

3. THE VENERABLE FEMALE MARTYR THEODOSIA

Theodosia was born as the result of the prayers of her mother to the holy martyr Anastasia who appeared to her and said that she will give birth. Her parents dedicated her to God and at an early age presented her to a convent. After the death of her parents, Thedosia inherited a vast estate, and from that estate, she ordered three icons from a goldsmith: The Savior, The Mother of God [The Theotokos] and St. Anastasia. The rest she distributed to the poor. She suffered in the year 730 A.D. during the reign of the evil Emperor Leo the Isaurian, the iconoclast, and received a two-fold wreath: virginity and martyrdom.

4. SAINT ALEXANDER, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

Alexander was the first to take up the fight against Arius. He died in the year 326 A.D.

5. SAINT JOHN USTJUZSKI, FOOL FOR CHRIST AND MIRACLE-WORKER

6. THE HOLY MARTYR JOHN [NAN] OF THESSALONICA

John suffered for the Faith at the hands of the Turks in Smyrna in 1802 A.D.

7. THE HOLY MARTYR ANDREW OF CHIOS

Andrew suffered for the Faith at the hands of the Turks in Constantinople in the year 1465 A.D.

8. THE FALL OF THE CITY OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Because of the sins of men, God permitted a bitter calamity to fall upon the capital of Christianity. On May 29, 1453 A.D., Sultan Muhammed II conquered Constantinople and executed Emperor Constantine XI.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE FALL OF THE CITY CONSTANTINOPLE [MAY 29, 1453]

EMPEROR CONSTANTINE XI

Constantine the Emperor, Constantinople bravely defends,
And to God quietly prays, within himself:
O Most-high God Who, from the heavens is looking
And injustice, you do not allow to defeat justice
Christians, against You, greatly sinned
And Your laws, have trampled greatly
Without Your permission, this battle is not
Because of men's sins, this blood sheds.
That this city falls, is it Your will
That they do not surrender, encourage my people,
That the Cross do not trample and to Islam go
But to endure bondage, until a freedom new
Let them servants be, let them even be slaves
Upon them, let hatred and ridicule befall,
But, with hope and repentance, let them endure
And, with bitter sighing, for former sins,
Until their sins, they wash away and every sin, they repay,
And until to You, they completely return.
If they have You, they will be rich,
All plundered treasures, You will replace.
Constantinople on earth, be or not be -
Constantintople in heaven, You established,
Where, with Your servants, you gloriously reign.
Before this Constantinople, behold, even I stand.
O Blessed One, on our sinful soul, have mercy,
When it is built anew, let the old one be razed!

REFLECTION

O how great was the fearlessness of the holy men and holy women! When we read about their lives, both shame and pride is awakened in us unwillingly - shame that we have lagged so far behind them and pride that they are of our Christian race. Neither sickness, nor prison, nor exile, nor suffering, nor humiliation, nor the sword, nor the abyss, nor fire, nor the gallows were able to shake the exalted peace of their souls, firmly attached to Christ, the Helmsman of the universe and human history. When Emperor Julian apostasized from the Faith and began to make waste of Christianity throughout the entire empire, St. Athanasius the Great quietly spoke of him to the faithful: "The cloud will pass!" (Nibiculaest, Transibit). And indeed, that dark cloud quickly passed and Christianity lowered its roots even deeper and spread its branches all the more throughout the world. The weakened wickedness of Julian against Christ was ended after several passing years with Julian's cry: "O Nazarene, You have conquered!" O sons of God, why then should we be afraid of anything from which God our Father is not afraid?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Marriage:

1. How that Grace gives a certain dignity to the manner of the procreating of the human race;
2. How It makes matrimony honorable by comparing it to the bonds of Christ with the Church.

HOMILY

-About the two-fold mystery of marriage-

"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church"(Ephesians 5:32).

Great is the mystery when a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife. The apostle himself, who was raised to the third heaven and who saw many mysteries of heaven, calls the physical union of men and women in marriage on earth "a great mystery." That is the mystery of love and life and only the mystery of Christ's bond with His Church is greater. Christ is called the Bridegroom and the Church, the Bride. Christ loves His Church so much that, because of Her, He left His heavenly Father - remaining with Him, of course, in unity of substance and divinity - and descended to earth and attached Himself to His Church and suffered for Her so that, by His Blood cleanse Her from every sin and spot and make Her worthy to be called His Bride. With His love He warms the Church, with His Blood He feeds the Church, and by His Holy Spirit He causes the Church to live and sanctifies and adorns Her. What a husband is to a wife, so Christ is to the Church. Man is the head of a woman and Christ is the Head of the Church. A husband loves his wife as his own body. A woman listens to her husband and the Church listens to Christ. A husband loves his wife as he loves his own body and Christ loves the Church as His own Body. A husband loves his wife as he loves himself and a wife reveres her husband, and Christ loves the Church as He loves Himself and the Church reveres Christ. Since no one hates his own flesh but rather warms and nourishes it so also Christ warms and feeds the Church as His own Body. And every individual human soul is the bride of Christ the Bridegroom and the assembly of all the faithful is the bride of Christ the Bridegroom. The kind of relationship of a believing man toward Christ so also is the relationship of the entire Church toward Christ. Christ is the Head of that great Body which is called the Church, and which is in part visible and in part invisible.

O my brethren, this is a great mystery! It is revealed to us according to the measure of our love toward Christ and of our fear of Christ's judgment.

O Lord, Gentle Savior cleanse us, save us and adorn our souls that we may be worthy of the immortal and indescribable unity with You in time and in eternity.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE ISAAC, THE CONFESSOR

During the reign of Emperor Valens there was a great persecution against Orthodoxy on the part of the Arians which the emperor assisted. Hearing about this persecution a hermit Isaac, somewhere from the east, left the wilderness and came to Constantinople to encourage the right-believers and to denounce the heretics. Precisely at that time, the Emperor Valens departed to the north with his army against the Goths, who had come down from the Danube toward Thrace. Isaac came before the emperor and said to him: "O Emperor, open the churches of the right-believers and God will bless your path." The emperor ignored the elder and proceeded on his way. The following day, Isaac ran out again before the emperor and again he repeated his warning and the emperor almost heeded the elder were it not that a certain advisor of his, a follower of the Arian heresy, prevented him. Isaac ran out before the emperor on the third day, grabbed the emperor's horse by the reins and begged the emperor to grant freedom to the Church of God and threatened him with the punishment of God if he acts contrary to his petition. The enraged emperor ordered that the elder be thrown into a chasm of mud and thorns. But three angels appeared and pulled the elder out of the chasm. The fourth day Isaac came before the emperor and prophesied a terrible death for him if he does not grant freedom to the Orthodox: "I am speaking to you O emperor, you will lead the army against the barbarians but you will not be able to sustain their attack. You will flee from them but you will be captured and burned alive." Thus, it happened. The barbarians cut down the Greek army as grass but the emperor, with his Arianite advisor, fled and hid in a basket. The barbarians arrived at that place and learning where the emperor was, surrounded the basket and set it afire and both the emperor and his advisor were burned alive. Following this, Theodosius the Great was crowned emperor. Theodosius, who heard about the prophecy of Isaac and its fulfillment, summoned Isaac and prostrated himself before him. Since peace reigned in the Church and the Arians banished into exile, Isaac wanted to return to his wilderness but was persuaded and remained in Constantinople. An aristocrat, Saturninus by name, built a monastery for the Elder Isaac where he lived a life of asceticism until his death, working many miracles. The monastery overflowed with monks and became a great monastery. Before his death, Isaac appointed Dalmatus, his disciple, as abbot after whom this monastery was later called. The god-pleasing Elder Isaac entered into eternity in the year 383 A.D., to find pleasure in gazing at the face of God.

2. SAINT MACRINA

Macrina was the grandmother of St. Basil the Great. She was wonderful in mind and in her piety. She was a disciple of St. Gregory Neo-Caesarea the miracle worker. During the reign of Diocletian, Macrina abandoned her home and, with her husband Basil, hid themselves in the forests and wilderness. Their property was confiscated but they did not grieve over it. Deprived of everything except their love for God, they settled in a primeval forest where they spent seven years. By God's providence, goats descended from the mountains and offered themselves to them and so they were nourished. They both died peacefully in the fourth century following great suffering for the Faith of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE ISAAC, THE CONFESSOR

Isaac, as the Prophet Isaiah
By virtue shines, similar to the sun,
The emperor he begs, the evil emperor he threatens,
Because, the great God he defies:
Against whom did you rise up O my emperor
Desolate, your kingdom will remain,
Because, against the Most-high God, you do wage war,
Under his feet, dust and ashes!
With an army, against the cruel barbarians, you set out
In your power, O emperor you hope!
To a little ant, your power is similar,
Whoever is with God, the true power has.
Your foot started out in two wars:
Against God and against men.
With poor men, everything will be easy,
But, make peace with the invincible God.
To Orthodoxy adhere, heresy reject,
For the cruel fire will fry you.
Fire here and over there fire,
Shamefully, both worlds you will forfeit.
The warning of the saint, the emperor does not heed,
Into battle entered; God he did not mention.
Into battle entered; from battle did not return -
As an odious smell, Valens was and passed.
And God, His Church freed,
And Isaac, of Paradise was made worthy.

REFLECTION

The Word of God is food for the soul. The Word of God is both power and light for the soul. He who reads the Word of God gives food, power and light to his soul. He who can, should read the Word of God in Holy Scripture and he who cannot should listen to him who reads Holy Scripture. All the saints emphasized the benefit of reading Holy Scripture. St. Seraphim of Sarov says: "The soul should be provided with the Word of God for the Word of God, as Gregory the Theologian says, is the bread of angels which feeds the soul that is hungry for God. But, above all, one should read the New Testament and the Psalter. From this proceeds illumination of the mind... It is very beneficial to read the Word of God in solitude and to read the entire Bible with understanding. For such a practice, above other good deeds, the Lord gives His mercy to man and fills him with the gift of understanding. When man provides his soul with the Word of God then he is filled with understanding of what is good and what is evil."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of the Priesthood [Holy Orders - Ordination]:

1. How that Grace sanctifies, illumines and enables a man for the service of shepherd and teacher;
2. How It empowers and fully empowers the priest for the performing of the other Mysteries.

HOMILY

-About the Mystery of Ordination-

"And when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts of the Apostles 6:6).

By laying their hands on the chosen faithful, the apostles consecrated bishops, priests and deacons. It is apparent from this that the Christian Faith is not only a teaching, but also a power. It is not only necessary to know but also to have power. It is not only necessary to be chosen by men but you should be confirmed by God. If power were not necessary for the priestly vocation, neither would the laying on of hands be necessary, but only the teaching from mouth to ear. The laying on of hands, therefore, signifies the transferring of authority and bringing down power on the chosen one. The power is in the Grace of God Who strengthens man, sanctifies and illumines him. Truly, the Grace of God is that which teaches, leads, shepherds and through the Mysteries [Sacraments] strengthens the flock of Christ. A priest is the vessel of this inexpressible, awesome and all sufficient power of Grace. Blessed is that priest who understands what kind of precious treasury he has become! Blessed is he if the fear of God does not leave him day and night until his last breathe! There is no greater honor on earth, no greater responsibility than the calling of the priestly service. By the laying on of hands by the bishop, the priest has come into contact with the heavenly and eternal source of Grace and with the authority of the apostles. By that, the priest has become a companion in Grace and co-celebrant with all the Orthodox priests from apostolic times until today with the great hierarchs, with the countless number of saints, confessors, miracle-workers, ascetics and martyrs. He is gently adorned by their dignity but he is burdened by their merits, their examples and their reproaches.

O my brethren, great and most great is the shepherd over Christ's spiritual flock. He is responsible to pray to God for all and all the faithful are required to pray to God for him.

O Lord, Supreme Hierarchy, sustain the Orthodox priests in strength, in wisdom, in purity, in zeal, in meekness and in every apostolic virtue by the Grace of Your Holy Spirit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE HERMAS

Hermas was one of the Seventy Apostles. He is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. **"Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes and the brethren which are with them" (Romans 16:14).** Hermas was a Greek by birth but lived in Rome for a long time. He was a bishop in Philippoupolis and ended his life as a martyr. He compiled a very instructive book called "The Shepherd" according to revelations from an angel of God. Hermas was a wealthy man but because of his sins and the sins of his sons, he fell into extreme poverty. Once while in prayer, a man appeared to him in white raiment with a staff in his hand and told him that he is an angel of repentance who was sent to be with him until the end of his life. The angel gave him twelve mandates:

1. Believe in God;
2. To live in simplicity and innocence; do not speak evil and give alms to all who beg;
3. Love truth and avoid falsehood;
4. Preserve chastity in your thoughts;
5. Learn patience and generosity;
6. To know that with every man, there is a good and an evil spirit;
7. To fear God and not to fear the devil;
8. To do every good and to refrain from every evil deed;
9. To pray to God from the depth of the soul with faith that our prayer will be fulfilled;
10. To guard against melancholy as the sister of doubt and anger;
11. To question true and false prophecies;
12. To guard against every evil desire.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR HERMEAS

Hermeas grew old as an imperial soldier and in his old age suffered for Christ the King. Since the evil judge tried in vain to dissuade him from the Faith of Christ and counseling him to offer sacrifices to the idols, the judge then gave orders that his teeth be knocked out with a stone and the skin peeled from his face with a knife. After that they threw him into a fiery furnace but, by the Grace of God, he was saved and stood up. Following that, by order of the judge he drank a bitter poison which was given to him by a magician, but the poison did him no harm. Witnessing this, the magician was so amazed that he openly confessed Christ for which he was immediately beheaded. Afterwards, they gouged out both of Hermeas' eyes but he did not grieve and cried out to the judge: "Take for yourself these bodily eyes that gaze upon the vanity of the world. I have eyes of the heart by which I clearly see the light of the truth." He was hung then by the feet upside down and those who did this to him were blinded and staggered around him. St. Hermeas beckoned them to come to him, laid his hands on them and, by prayer to the Lord, restored their sight. Witnessing all of this, the judge became as enraged as a lion, drew a knife and severed the head of this godly-man. Christians secretly removed the body of Hermeas and honorably buried it. His relics gave healing to all the sick and to the afflicted. St. Hermeas suffered in the year 166 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Antoninus.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR PHILOSOPHUS

This martyr of Christ was born in the vicinity of Alexandria. During the time of the persecution of Christians, St. Philosophus did not want to deny Christ the Lord before the pagan princes and judges. For that, the pagans subjected him to violent tortures. Since he was tortured in various ways, they finally placed him on a soft bed, tied his legs and hands and permitted an immoral woman to come to him and to lure him into sin. When St. Philosophus sensed that the sin of passion was being aroused in him from the touch of the woman's hand, he placed his tongue between his teeth, bit it off and spit it in the face of the depraved one. Because of that, the passion subsided in him and the immoral woman was so horrified that she immediately fled from him. He was beheaded after that about the year 252 A.D. in his youth and took up habitation in the kingdom of eternal youth.(*)

(*) In the Greek Prologue, Philosophus is commemorated on May 1.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT HERMEAS AND THE MAGICIAN

The old and evil magician, poisoner and liar,
In everything very small, but great in fear,
Bitter poison, to the holy Hermeas, he gave,
From this poison, even the serpents would hide!
Hermeas, the poison drank: death did not claim him,
And the old magician, saw and trembled all over,
O that wonderful miracle, aloud he cried out,
Over the soldier of God, the poison has no power!
Let be hidden, the darkened days of my life,
Let be erased, the years of my shameful life!
To dumb deceits, my entire life I dedicated,
My entire life, in the service of these idols dumb.
And just today, in great fear, I see:
The One and the True God, the God of Hermeas is.
Crucified as Christ, the Lord from the heavens
His only, are the miracles truthful.
From now on, Christ's I am: O Christ, forgive me
For the least servant, You, O Good One, receive me.
Forgive me my all too many sins, forgive me,
For You, I will sacrifice, body and lifeless bones!
Bitterly repentant, that, the elder uttered,
At once cleansed, of falsehood and fears,
Among Christians, himself, he openly numbered
The sword over him flashed and with blood, baptized him.

REFLECTION

This life is a spiritual struggle. To conquer or to be defeated! If we conquer, we will enjoy the fruits of victory throughout all eternity; if we are defeated, we will endure the horrors of destruction throughout all eternity. This life is a duel between man and all that is contrary to the Divine. God is an Almighty ally to all who sincerely call upon Him for help. "This life is not a joke or a play thing," says Father John of Cronstadt, "but men turn it into a joke and plaything. But the capricious play around with time given to us for preparing for eternity, play around with empty words. They gather together as guests, they sit and chatter and after that they sit and play in this way or the other way; they gather in theatres and there they entertain themselves. All life for them is an amusement. But, woe unto them who are only entertaining themselves."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Grace of God the Holy Spirit in the Mystery [Sacrament] of Holy Unction [Anointing with Oil]:

1. How that Grace works through sanctified oil;
2. How according to prayer and faith, It heals every illness and every infirmity.

HOMILY

-About the Mystery [Sacrament] of Holy Unction [Anointing with Holy Oil]-

"...And anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (St. Mark 6:13).

The holy apostles did this and it is commanded that we do the same. The Apostle James writes to us: **"Is there any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him"** (St. James 5: 14-15). You need not call anyone except the priests, the elders of the church; you need not anoint him in any other name except the Name of the Lord, so that it will not appear as witchcraft. No one will be able to raise him except the Lord Himself nor can any other forgive his sins except the One Lord. Why oil and not something else? Because it is commanded and so that we may show obedience and faith. Why is it commanded that we baptize with water and anoint [Chrismate] with oil [myrrh] and communicate with bread and wine? That is God's choice and God's prudence and ours is to believe and to obey. Various elements are used in the different Mysteries [Sacraments], but the Grace of God is one as our Lord is one and everything is from the Lord. Why does our Lord need some materials in order to pour out His Grace upon us? The Lord does not need the material but we do as long as we are material, we need material. Condescending to our weakness, the Lord uses matter. To the incorporeal angels, He gives Grace in an incorporeal manner.

Oil alone is helpless of itself as every other material is helpless of itself, but the Grace of God is All-powerful. Through oil, the Lord gives the Grace of His Holy Spirit and that Grace heals the sick, raises the infirm and restores sanity to the insane.

O my brethren, how inexpressible is God's goodness! What did not God do for us? And what more could we possibly desire? He knew all of our needs beforehand and, for all of them, He foresaw the cures in advance. He only seeks from us that we believe in Him and fulfill His prescriptions. Is it not insolent and shameful that we more often conscientiously follow the instructions of physicians, mortal men such as we are, and neglect the prescriptions of the Immortal God?

O All-good Lord, melt our stony hearts by the power of Your Grace so that before the hour of our death, we may show indebted thanksgiving toward You: toward You O our All-good and our All-wise God!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JUNE

1. THE HOLY MARTYR JUSTIN THE PHILOSOPHER

Justin was born of Greek parents in the Samaritan town of Shechem, later called Nablus one hundred-five years after Christ. He zealously sought wisdom among philosophers, at first with the Stoics and after that with the Peripatetics, the Pythagorians and finally with the Platonists. Even though Plato's philosophy did not satisfy him, nevertheless, he adhered to it the longest time not having anything else that would attract him more. By God's Providence an honorable elder encountered Justin who confused him concerning the philosophy of Plato and persuaded him that men cannot know the truth about God unless God reveals it and God revealed the truth about Himself in the books of Holy Scripture. Justin began to read Holy Scripture and became a thoroughly convinced Christian. However, he did not want to be baptized nor to be called a Christian until he was personally convinced of the falseness of all those accusations which the pagans raised against the Christians. Coming to Rome in a philosopher's dolman [cape], he quickly achieved great respect there as well as many followers. He was present at the martyrdom of St. Ptolemy and St. Lucian. Witnessing the tortures of innocent Christians, Justin wrote an Apologia (Defense) of Christians and Christian teachings and presented it to the Emperor Antoninus and to the Senate. The emperor read the Apologia with care and ordered the persecution of Christians to cease. Justin took a copy of the emperor's decree and, with it, journeyed to Asia where, with the help of this decree, saved many persecuted Christians. After that he again returned to Rome. When a persecution began under Emperor Marcus Aurelius, he wrote another Apologia and sent it to the emperor. A disreputable philosopher Crescens, a Cynic, out of envy accused him of being a Christian because Justin had always overcome him in all debates and Justin found himself in prison. Desiring the death of Justin and fearing that he [Justin] would somehow justify himself before the court, Crescens seized the opportunity and somehow poisoned Justin in prison. So ended the earthly life of this great defender of the Christian Faith who took up habitation in blessed eternity in the year 166 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS JUSTIN, CHARITON, CHARITA, EUELPISTUS, HIERAX, PAEON, VALERIAN [LIBERIANUS] AND JUST

They all suffered martyrdom in Rome during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and the Roman prefect [eparch] Rusticus. When Rusticus asked: "Do you think that if you die for Christ you will receive a reward in heaven?" St. Justin replied: "We do not think, we know!" Following that, they were all beheaded in the year 163 A.D. and took up habitation in the eternal kingdom of Christ the God.

3. THE VENERABLE AGAPITUS OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Agapitus was a doctor who practiced medicine by using natural remedies. He was a disciple of St. Anthony of the Caves. He cured people through prayer and by giving them vegetables from which he prepared bread for himself. In this manner he cured Prince Vladimir Monomachus for which Agapitus became known throughout. Being envious of this the prince's physician, an Armenian, began to slander Agapitus. When Agapitus became ill, the Armenian came to him and looking at him said that he [Agapitus] would die within three days and that if he [Agapitus] did not die, he [the Armenian physician] would become a monk. Agapitus said that it had been revealed to him by the Lord that he would not die within three days but within three months. And so it happened. After the death of Agapitus, the Armenian came to the Abbot of the Caves and begged him to tonsure him a monk for, he said, Agapitus appeared to him from the other world and reminded him of his promise. Thus, the once envious one became a humble monk by the Providence of God Who wishes that all men be saved. St. Agapitus died about the year 1095 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

ST. JUSTIN THE PHILOSOPHER

Whoever belongs to Christ, that one dies for Christ,
Saint Justin, defender of the truth,
Recognized the power of Christ and expressed it,
Fearlessly turned around the entire empire
Defending the righteous; the heathens admonishing,
To the entire world, with truth shining.
He was from the city of the unbaptized where once ten lepers,
To Christ the Savior, bitterly cried out
By His word, they were healed,
And now, Justin, the leprosy of falsehood
By the power of Christ's Faith, alleviated,
As a father, he protected Christians,
The foolishness of paganism he unmasked,
To the emperors, he speaks the truth -
He was a light until the candle burned down,
Until the evil ones, his body took,
His soul to Paradise, the angels raised
That in heaven, it shines like the sun
To whom his Apologia shines,
Glorifying the name of the immortal Justin
Teaching the world, what is the truth.

REFLECTION

No one has ever spread as much shameful slander about Christ the Lord as the Jews. Their Talmud boils over with evil and malice toward the Lord. But all of those worthless calumnies are refuted by the most prominent historian of the Jews, Josephus Flavius, rabbi and scholar who lived toward the end of the first century after Christ. Josephus writes: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for He appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning Him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day." [Antiquities of the Jews, Volume 2, Page 45 1845 Edition]. Thus wrote a man not believing in Christ but a scholar free of prejudice and malice.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of Peter's mother-in-law:

1. How the Lord took the feverish woman by the hand and the fever left her and she served them;
2. How the Lord can cure even me of the fever of passion so that I could immediately straighten up and serve Him with my whole spirit.

HOMILY

-About what is the beginning of wisdom-

**"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"
(Proverbs 1:7).**

If someone were to know the number of stars in the heavens and the names of the fish in the sea and the amount of the grass in the field and the habits of the beasts in the forest and would not have the fear of God, his knowledge is as water in a sieve. And before death, his knowledge [of God] makes him a greater coward than the completely ignorant.

If someone were able to conjecture all the thoughts of mankind and to foretell the fate of mankind and to manifest every mystery that the earth conceals in its depths and not have the fear of God, his knowledge is as milk poured into an unclean container from which all the milk is spoiled. And in his hour of death, his wisdom will not shine even as much as a piece of charcoal without a flame, but his night of death will make his death even darker.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." How can he who has not begun correctly, finish correctly? Whoever started out on a wrong path from the beginning must turn back and must take-up the correct beginning, i.e., he must tread with his feet on the correct path. He who does not have the fear of God cannot have the love for God. What are we talking about? He who has no fear of God has no faith in God. The greatest ascetics, those who mortified themselves and who for a period of forty or fifty years daily and nightly lived a life of mortification until death, were filled with the fear of God and these, the most sinless among mortals, cried out in their hour of death: "O God, have mercy on me a sinner!"

The fear of God is the salt of total piety. If there is not that salt then all of our piety is inspid and lax. The fear of God girds the loins, girdles the stomach and makes the heart sober, restrains the mind and flogs self-will. Where is repentance without the fear of God? Where is humility? Where is restraint? Where is total chastity? Where is patience? Where is service and obedience?

O my brethren, let us embrace this word as the holy truth: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." O Lord Almighty, implant Your fear in our hearts.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT NICEPHORUS, CONFESSOR AND PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Nicephorus was a nobleman of Constantinople. His father Theodore, a high-ranking official of the imperial court, was wealthy and pious. Nicephorus served at the court for several years in the same profession as his father. Seeing all the vanity of the world, he withdrew to the shores of the Bosphorus and founded a monastery. The monastery was quickly filled with monks and he governed it but was not willing to receive the monastic tonsure under the pretext that he was not worthy, even though, in all things he served as a model to all. Before that, he participated in the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicea, 783 A.D.] as a layman at the wishes of the emperor and the patriarch and the Council benefited greatly by his superior knowledge of Sacred Scripture. When Patriarch Tarasius died, Nicephorus was elected patriarch against his will. Immediately following his election in the year 806 A.D., he received the monastic tonsure and in succession all other ecclesiastical ranks. He was enthroned as patriarch in the Church of the Divine Wisdom of God [Hagia Sophia]. This took place during the reign of Emperor Nicephorus who immediately, after that, went to war against the Bulgarians and was slain. His son, Stauracius, reigned only two months and died. After him, the good Emperor Michael, surnamed Rangabe, ruled but he reigned for only two years until he was overthrown by Leo the Armenian and banished into exile. When Leo was crowned, the patriarch sent him a book of the Orthodox Confession of Faith to sign (according to the custom of all Byzantine emperors which was considered an oath that they will uphold and defend the True Faith). The emperor did not sign it but rather postponed it until after the coronation. When the patriarch crowned him, Leo refused to sign the book and quickly proved himself to be a heretic; an iconoclast. The patriarch attempted to advise him and to restore him to the True Faith, but in vain. The emperor forcibly banished Nicephorus into exile to the island of Proconnesus where he remained for thirteen years enduring every kind of misery and privation and entered eternity in the year 827 A.D. As patriarch he governed the Church of Christ for nine years.

2. THE NEO-MARTYR CONSTANTINE

Constantine was born of Muslim parents on the island of Mitylene. Having been healed of a grave illness with the help of holy water in the church and witnessing other miracles of the Faith of Christ, he was baptized on Mt. Athos in the Scete of Kapsokalyvia. Later on Constantine fell into the hands of the Turks who hanged him in Constantinople on June 2, 1819 A.D. after forty days of cruel tortures.

3. THE HOLY NEO-MARTYR JOHN OF SOCHAVA

John was a nobleman from Trebizond. He was accused by an envious Latin and suffered for Christ in the city of Akerman in the year 1492 A.D. After being tortured for refusing to embrace the Persian religion (for the mayor of this town was an adherent of that faith), St. John was tied to the legs of a horse and dragged throughout the town. An evil Jew, upon seeing him, ran up to John and slaughtered him. That night, many saw a fiery pillar over his body and three light-bearing men around it. Later, the Moldavian commander, Joalexander, with great homage translated his honorable body to the town of Sochava and buried it in the metropolitan church where it reposes even today and miraculously saves men from various pains and illnesses. John suffered honorably and was glorified on June 2, 1492 A.D.

4. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR ERASMUS OF OHRID

This saint was born in Antioch and lived during the reign of Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. He lived a strict life of asceticism on Mt. Lebanon and was endowed by God with the great gift of working miracles. As a bishop, he went out to preach the Good News. Arriving at the town of Ohrid, Erasmus, by his prayers, resurrected the son of a man named Anastasius and baptized him. At this time, Erasmus baptized many other pagans and destroyed the altars of the idols in Ohrid. For that he was denounced before Emperor Maximian who, at that time, was residing in Illyria. The emperor brought him before a copper idol of Zeus and ordered him to offer sacrifice and to worship the idol. St. Erasmus manifested so great a power that a horrible dragon came out from the idol, which frightened the people. Again the saint manifested great power and the dragon died. The saint then preached Christ and baptized twenty thousand souls. The embittered emperor ordered that all twenty thousand be beheaded and subjected Erasmus to severe tortures and then cast him into prison. An angel of God appeared to Erasmus as once to the Apostle Peter and led Erasmus out of the prison. After that, this servant of God departed for Campania where he preached the Gospel to the people and then again returned to the town of Hermelia where he retreated to a cave and desired to live a life of asceticism until his death. Before his death, he bowed down three times toward the east and with uplifted arms prayed to God that He forgive sins and to grant eternal life to all those who, with faith, would invoke his name. At the completion of his prayer a voice from heaven was heard: "So let it be as you prayed, my little healer Erasmus!" Completely joyful, the saint gazed up at the heavens once more and saw a wreath of glory as it was descending upon him and saw the choirs of angels, prophets, apostles and martyrs who came toward him to receive his holy soul. Finally he cried out: "O Lord, receive my spirit!" and died about the year 303 A.D. The cave with a small church dedicated to St. Erasmus, exists today not far from Ohrid and, from it, even today the great power of the chosen one of God, Erasmus the priestly-martyr, is manifested.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT NICEPHORUS

Great was Nicephorus, great among the saints,
Great was Nicephorus, as a giant among men.
And [Leo] the emperor with the name of a lion, was too small,
In spite and malice was his [Leo's] entire glory.
To lead the affairs of the State, the emperor is there,
And not the dogmas of the Orthodox Faith, to judge.
The dogmas to him, Patriarch Nicephorus interpreted,
But the arrogant little emperor pretended to be wise.
Even though emperor he became, a simple shudra he remained,
Not wanting to hear the counsels of the servant wise
The emperor banished the patriarch to a desolate distance
And himself, divine truth, began to interpret.
Great was Nicephorus, great in exile,
As on the throne in his dignity.
From within, was all of his greatness
And not false and accidental from today until tomorrow.
Nicephorus, by faith and purity, a saint became,
With a strong faith, fasting and humble simplicity.
And Emperor Leo they terribly slew,
Perhaps he would have repented but it was too late.

REFLECTION

The veneration of icons is an integral part of Orthodoxy from which it cannot be separated. That the veneration of icons appears to some people the same as idolatry is no proof against icons. To the Jews, it seemed that Christ worked miracles by the power of Satan and not God and to the Romans, it seemed that Christian martyrs were ordinary sorcerers and magicians. Saint Nicephorus said to Leo the Armenian the iconoclastic emperor: "The icon is a divine thing and not to be worshipped." Following this, he explained "how God commanded Moses to make a serpent of brass and to raise it in the wilderness even though, just before this, He had commanded: **"Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image" (Exodus 20:4)**. He commanded this in order to save the chosen people from the idolatry of the Egyptians and He commanded that He, the One and Most High God, would manifest His power through a visible thing. In the same manner He manifests His power through icons. That is His holy will and our aid for salvation. If icons are things of little significance or even idolatry, why would many of the holiest and most spiritual men and women in the history of the Church have suffered to the death for icons?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the leper: **"And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him saying, Lord, if You will, You can make me clean" (St. Matthew 8:2):**

1. How the leper implored the Lord to heal him and how the Lord touched him with His hand and he was healed;
2. How I, too, am leperous from sin and how the Lord can touch my soul and heal it if I pray to Him.

HOMILY

-About how wisdom proclaims itself everywhere-

"Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the open squares she raises her voice; down the crowded ways she calls out, at the city gates she utters her words" (Proverbs 1:20-21).

The Wisdom of God is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, through Whom all that was created, was created. All that was created manifests its Omniscient Creator, both that which is in the field as well as that which is in the city. In a field is a pure and bright nature but in the city is man with his trades and skills. The Wisdom of God cries out and does not whisper throughout all of nature and through all beneficial trades and skills of man. She [Wisdom] covered all the fields, she filled the entire city and she is above the earth and under the earth, in the heights of the stars and in the depths of the seas. He who wants to hear her can hear her in every place; he who wants to learn from her and to be delighted by her can be taught and delighted in every place; he who wants to be corrected and built up by her can be corrected and built up by her in every place.

Thus, the Wisdom of God is obvious and evident in all created things in the world from its very beginning. But, the Wisdom of God is more obvious and more evident in the prophets and in other men of God who were made worthy to approach her [Wisdom] outside created nature. Through their mouths, the Wisdom of God was proclaimed in the fields, in the cities, on the streets of the cities and at the doors of men.

But, the Wisdom of God is most audible and most obvious in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God was manifested in the flesh and demonstrated to men in its miraculous power and beauty. This Wisdom of God does not speak through things nor through men, but speaks of itself and from itself alone, personally and directly. By His wisdom the Lord filled the entire world through His Holy Church, so that it can be said that just as twenty centuries ago in Palestine so, He today, through the servants of the Word cries out in the fields, on the streets, to the greatest throngs in the world, throughout all the cities and before all doors.

O my brethren, let us open the doors of our souls to the Wisdom of God Incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ!

O Lord Jesus, Wisdom and Power of God, open our souls and abide in them.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JUNE - 3 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR LUCILLIAN AND THOSE WITH HIM: CLAUDIUS, HYPATIUS, PAUL, DIONYSIUS AND THE VIRGIN PAULA

Lucillian grew old as a pagan priest and, as a graying elder, recognized the truth of Christianity and was baptized. His conversion to Christianity provoked great anxiety among the heathens in Nicomedia and he was brought to trial. Because he did not want to deny his new Faith Lucillian was violently beaten and, completely bruised, was thrown into prison. In prison he met four young men: Claudius, Hypatius, Paul and Dionysius who, because of their faith in Christ, were also imprisoned. The elder greatly rejoiced in the young men and they in him and together spent all their time in pious conversations, prayers and the chanting of psalms. When they were led out of prison they were tortured by various means and finally sent to Byzantium where the soldiers beheaded Claudius, Hypatius, Paul, Dionysius and Lucillian was crucified by the Jews. The nefarious Jews pierced Lucillian's entire body with nails. A virgin named Paula openly took the martyr's bodies and honorably buried them. For this, she was accused and, after having been tortured, was beheaded receiving two wreaths from the Lord: the wreath of virginity and the wreath of martyrdom. Their martyrdom occurred during the reign of Emperor Aurelian between the years 270-275 A.D.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR LUCIAN

Lucian was a Roman renowned for his noble birth, wealth and learning. For a period of time he was a disciple of the Apostle Peter. Later, Pope Clement sent him, together with Dionysius the Areopagite, to Gaul to preach the Gospel consecrating him bishop beforehand. With great zeal Lucian sowed the teachings of Christ at first in Gaul and, afterward, throughout Belgium. When the evil Emperor Domitian began his persecution of Christians, a cadre of men were sent by him from Rome to Gaul to seek out and to capture the Christian missionaries. They first captured St. Dionysius and, after that, they went in pursuit of Lucian. Finding Lucian in Belgium together with his assistants, the presbyter Maxianus and the deacon Julian, the soldier killed these two in one place and in another place, beheaded Lucian. After Lucian had been beheaded, his lifeless body rose up from the ground, took his head in his hands (similar to St. Dionysius and St. John Vladimir) and then walked to the place where he desired to be buried. There he fell and there he was buried. Later, a church was built over his relics.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR DIMITRI, CROWN-PRINCE OF RUSSIA

The ambitious Boris Godunov treacherously murdered Dimitri at the age of eight in the town of Uglich in the year 1591 A.D. After his death, Dimitri appeared to a monk and prophesied that a false Dimitri will appear and will cause the death of the murderer Boris Godunov which afterward actually happened. A countless number of miracles occurred at the grave of the slain Crown-Prince. After fifteen years his relics were discovered to be whole and incorrupt. They were translated solemnly to Moscow and interred in the church of the Holy Archangel Michael.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR DIMITRI, CROWN-PRINCE

Dimitri, a small child, a great saint became,
And bloody Godunov the great, forever remained cursed.
Craving for power, the ambitious one can never be satisfied,
In both worlds, that is fire; fire unquenchable.
From Boris' goblet, men are poisoned,
But, from the goblet, Boris drank and himself judged.
Down the river of blood, to the throne, Boris sails,
But into the sea of maggots, that river flows.
As from an earthquake, the crown on the criminal trembles,
Of everything frightened, of everything afraid, looks toward the heavens.
Whoever innocent blood sheds, his own let him prepare,
From this, may there not be an exception and there is none.
Craving for power winged horse, wings of wax
While to the height of authority it soars the wings melted!
Then, from the heights to the bottom falls: lower than a vagabond,
And Satan to his own speaks: Behold the hundredth madman!
Dimitri, the young crown-prince innocently suffered,
He, a crown-prince was then and a crown-prince now.

REFLECTION

O, if only we could enter into the mystery of God's Providence in the lives of men! We would be filled with fear and trembling before every evil deed and before every sin of men. "I understood Your works O Lord and I am amazed." In certain great events, the mystery of God's Providence is obvious even to men of lesser spirituality, for example in the fate of the Crown-Prince Dimitri and the bloodthirsty and power-loving Boris Godunov. In order to arrive at the first place among the noblemen in the court of Tsar Theodore, Godunov poisoned many of the nobles. When he reached the position of being first to the Tsar, he even planned to poison the brother of the Tsar, the eight-year old Dimitri. On several occasions, through hired mercenaries, he administered the most bitter poison to the young Crown-Prince but the poison had no affect. Providence permitted that the criminal murder his victim, not secretly and quietly, but openly. Godunov dispatched the murderers who, openly in the middle of the day, murdered the Crown-Prince. Thus did Dimitri become an open martyr and Godunov became an open criminal for all of Russia. After that, Dimitri surfaced and proclaimed that he was the Crown Prince (as though he was the rightful Crown-prince Dimitri and that someone else was murdered) and set out with an army against Godunov. He defeated Godunov and drove him to such despair that Boris prepared poison and took the poison himself. He, who poisoned others, poisoned himself! He who murdered the innocent Dimitri was himself defeated by a man with the name of Dimitri! He, who has spiritual eyes to see, let him see the mystery of God's Providence.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous calming of the tempest on the lake: **"And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with waves: but He was asleep" (St. Matthew 8:24):**

1. How the disciples cried out: **"Lord, save us: we perish!" (St. Matthew 8:25)** and how the Lord, with one word, calmed the tempest and there was a great calm;
2. How the Lord awaits that I cry out to Him in fear to calm the tempest of passions, of men and of demons on the sea of my life.

HOMILY

-About the peace of the simple and the prosperity of the fools-

**"For the turning away of the simple shall slay them
and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them"
(Proverbs 1:32).**

Does peace kill? Yes, godless peace kills. Does prosperity destroy? Yes, prosperity without God and contrary to the laws of God can destroy. Simple are they who seek such a peace and they who run after such prosperity are fools. For, in essence, they do not seek peace but rather the sword and are not running after prosperity but rather after destruction. What is the peace of the simple and what is the prosperity of fools? The peace of the simple is physical peace and the prosperity of fools is physical feasting. King Herod wanted such a peace and he was consumed by worms. Jezebel wanted such a prosperity and dogs consumed her.

By what name would we call a man who, in deciding to build a house, thinks that he will place the roof in the air first and afterward erect walls and then lay the foundation of the house? We would call him a simpleton and a fool. Much the same are all those who are attempting to establish peace in the world without interior peace and to establish exterior prosperity for men without interior prosperity. The Christian Faith is the only one which builds from the foundation and the foundation is Christ, a firm and indestructible rock. Thus, the Christian Faith for the peace and prosperity of men builds on Christ. An internal, blessed and joyful peace is built on Christ the Lord and on this peace, external peace is built. So also is true and lasting prosperity. It is still better to say that true peace and true prosperity is like a well-built house and external peace and prosperity are like the external adornments of the house. However, if the adornments fall, the house will stand but if the house is destroyed, will the adornments then hang in the air?

O my brethren, the Christian teaching is the only reasonable teaching about peace and prosperity. All else is madness and foolishness. For, how could the servants build a mansion on the estate of the Master without permission of the Master and without His help?

O Lord, the source of eternal true peace and true prosperity, save us from the peace of the simple and the prosperity of fools.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT METROPHANES ,THE FIRST PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

His father Dometius, the brother of the Roman Emperor Probus, fled from Rome as a Christian during the persecution of Christians and arrived at Byzantium. Titus, the Byzantine bishop, ordained him a presbyter. Following the death of Titus, Dometius became the bishop of Byzantium. After the death of Dometius, his eldest son Probus occupied the episcopal throne and after the death of Probus, Metrophanes assumed the episcopal throne. When Emperor Constantine first saw Metrophanes, he liked him as his own father. At the time of the First Ecumenical Council [325 A.D.], Metrophanes was already a man of one-hundred seventeen years and unable to participate in the work of the Council, so he appointed Alexander his Choriepiscopus as his representative. The emperor, by his intervention at the Council, conferred upon him the title of patriarch. Thus, he was the first patriarch of Constantinople. Further, the emperor invited the entire Council to visit the ailing and aged arch-pastor. When the emperor asked him whom he wished to name as successor to the patriarchal throne, Metrophanes named Alexander. Following that he said to Alexander of Alexandria: "O brother, you will remain my most worthy successor." He then took the hand of Archdeacon Athanasius (later Athanasius the Great and Patriarch of Alexandria) and praised him before all. After this prophecy of his successor Metrophanes sought forgiveness from all and within ten days gave up his soul to God in the year 325 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR CONCORDIUS

During his life on earth Concordius was an ascetic and a miracle-worker. During the reign of Emperor Antoninus he was arrested because of his faith in Christ. Following imprisonment and tortures, he was led to the stone idol of Zeus in order to worship it. Concordius spat on the idol and because of that was immediately beheaded.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS FRONTASIUS, SEVERINUS, SEVERIAN AND SILANUS

They were martyred in France during the reign of Emperor Claudius. After they were beheaded, they rose to their feet, took their heads into their hands, crossed over the river Ile, and arrived at the church of the Holy Birth-giver of God where Bishop Frontanius was praying. Entering the Church, they laid their heads before the feet of the bishop and lay down crossing their hands over their chests. They were honorably buried there. During their burial, an invisible host of angels was heard singing.

4. THE VENERABLE ZOSIMUS, BISHOP OF NEW BABYLON [A TOWN IN EGYPT]

Zosimus lived a life of asceticism on Mt. Sinai. He came to Alexandria on business and was consecrated as bishop of New Babylon by the Blessed Patriarch Apollinarius. He was a worthy shepherd of the flock of Christ but when he was overcome by old age and fatigue he, again, withdrew to Mt. Sinai where he rendered his soul to God and received the wreath of glory among the great hierarchs. He lived and died in the sixth century.

5. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR ASTIUS, BISHOP OF DYRRACHIUM

Astius suffered during the reign of Trajan. At first he was beaten with lead rods and after that stripped naked and crucified on a tree. His naked body was rubbed with honey so that wasps and hornets may sting him. In his greatest torment, St. Astius glorified God, died and received two wreaths both as a martyr and as a hierarch.

6. SAINT MARTHA AND SAINT MARY, THE SISTERS OF LAZARUS

Following the Ascension of the Lord, Lazarus set out to preach the Gospel. His two sisters assisted him in this. It is not known where they died.

HYMN OF PRAISE

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality, a virtue which by God is commanded,
Until now, by it, many souls were drawn to Paradise.
Abraham the Wonderful showed infinite hospitality,
Immeasurable and cordial and not hypocritical.
And King David greatly respected hospitality,
That is why, the life of King Saul, he strictly guarded.
And when the Ancient One [Christ] appeared, older than the aged Abraham,
From the Lineage of David, when darkness hid,
Then, Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus,
Showed hospitality these hospitable virgins:
Hosted the Greatest One since the sun flows,
With Hospitality, each one of them heavenly paradise attained.
With hospitality, perfect in heart and food,
Hospitality most worthy in word and in deed.
And the Lord Most-rich, abundantly repaid,
And, this hospitable home, when death saddened
Jesus, the deceased brother to the sisters, resurrected,
And, to them, eternal glory spread throughout the entire world.
This is the reward of hospitality from God Himself,
The Lord loves the Hospitality of a sincere heart.
Holy Church boasts of Martha and Mary,
Teaching that we are also guests at the table of the Lord.

REFLECTION

It is a horrible thing to kill a man. There are no words to describe the horror which lays hold on the murderer. While a man is preparing to kill another man, he thinks that to kill a man is the same as killing an ox. When he carries out his preconceived crime then, all at once, he realizes that he has declared war on heaven and earth and that he has become an exile and cut off from both heaven and earth. The victim does not give him peace neither day nor night. A known criminal came to Zosimus on Sinai and begged him to tonsure him a monk. Zosimus clothed him in the monastic habit and sent him to the monastery of Venerable Dorotheus near Gaza to lead a life of asceticism in the Cenobia. After nine years the tonsured criminal returned to St. Zosimus, returned his monastic habit and sought his secular clothes. To the question why are you doing this, the criminal replied that for nine years he has fervently prayed to God, fasted, kept vigil and fulfilled all acts of obedience and that he feels that many of his sins were forgiven but that one of his sins torments him continually. At one time, he killed an innocent child and that child appears to him day and night and asks him: "Why did you kill me?" Because of that he decided to leave and to turn himself in to the authorities that they may execute him and thus to repay blood for blood. Dressing in his former clothes, he went to the town of Diospolis where he acknowledged his crime and was beheaded. Thus, by his blood, he washed away his bloody sin.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the possessed ones [madmen] of Gergesene [Gadarene]: **"Now when He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gerasenes, there met Him two men who were possessed, coming from the tombs, so exceedingly fierce that no one could pass by that way" (St. Matthew 8:28):**

1. How the Lord cast out the demons from the ones possessed and the possessed ones became calm and meek;
2. How the Lord stands beside me and waits to be called to help me and to cleanse me from every evil spirit which lays hold of me and separates me from God.

HOMILY

-About trust in the Lord and not in your own understanding-

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; on your own understanding rely not" [Proverbs 3:5].

If all the mountains would move toward you, would you be able to push them back with your hands? You could not. If darkness after darkness of all the mysteries in the heavens and on the earth rushed to the small taper of your understanding would you, with your understanding, be able to illuminate the darkness? Even less! Do not rely on your understanding for, from the perishable matter which you call intellect, a greater portion of it is nothing more than dead ashes. O man, do not rely on your understanding for it is a road over which a mob rushes a hungry, thirsty, motley and curious mob of sensual impressions.

O man, trust in the Lord with all your heart. In Him is understanding without end and all-discerning. The Lord says: **"I am understanding; mine is strength" (Proverbs 8:14).** He looks on the paths on which your blood flows and all the crossroads on which your thoughts wander. With compassion and love He offers Himself to you as a leader and you rely on your darkened and perishable understanding. Where was your understanding before your birth? Where was your understanding when your body was taking form, when your heart began to beat and flow with blood, when your eyes began to open and when your voice began to flow from your throat? Whose understanding was all this while your mind was still sleeping as charcoal in a coal mine? Even when your understanding awoke, can you enumerate all the illusions which it has delivered to you, all the lies in which it has entangled you, all the dangers which it did not foresee? O my brother, trust only in the Lord with all your heart! Until now, He has rescued you numerous times from your own understanding, from illusions and its lies and from danger in which it has pushed you. A blind man is compared to the man who can see, so is your understanding compared to the understanding of God. O blind one, trust in the Leader. O brother, trust only in the Lord with all your heart.

O Lord, All-seeing, Eternal and Infallible Understanding, deeper than the universe and more radiant than the sun, deliver us, even now from the errors of our understanding.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR DOROTHEUS, BISHOP OF TYRE

Dorotheus was Bishop of Tyre from the time of Diocletian to the time of Julian the Apostate under whom he was tortured and suffered for the Orthodox Faith. He lived on earth one hundred seven years and, pleasing God, he took up habitation in life eternal in the year 361 A.D. Dorotheus was a very educated man and wrote many instructive works in Greek and Latin. Especially famous is his Greek-Latin Syntagma.

2. VENERABLE THEODORE, THE HERMIT

Theodore was a miracle-worker. Purifying his spirit through a long life of asceticism in the wilderness of Jordan, Theodore received from God the gift of working miracles. Traveling by boat to Constantinople, it happened that the boat wandered off course and water for drinking ceased to exist. Because of thirst all the travelers on the boat were at the point of death. Theodore raised his hands to heaven, prayed to God and traced the sign of the cross over the sea water. After that, he said to the boatmen to draw water from the sea and drink. When they drank the water it was sweet. When they all began to bow down before Theodore, he beseeched them not to thank him but to thank the Lord God Who worked this miracle because of His love for mankind. Theodore died peacefully in the year 583 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE ANOUB

Anoub was one of the great Egyptian monks. He suffered much for the True Faith. Prior to his death, three aged hermits visited him and he, "a discernor of the thoughts of man," revealed all the secrets of their hearts to them. Anoub died peacefully in the second half of the fifth century.

4. BLESSED IGOR

Igor was the Prince of Chernigov and Kiev. Persecuted by his kinsmen, he withdrew from the world and was tonsured a monk. The inhabitants of Kiev, dissatisfied with the Olgovitch dynasty, wanted to exterminate it. They charged the monastery, captured the innocent and young Schemnik Igor and slew him. As a result of this crime, many were the misfortunes that befell the inhabitants of Kiev and over the grave of this blessed monk candles were seen on several occasions lighted by themselves and a fiery pillar was seen over the church where he was buried. This occurred in the year 1147 A.D.

5. THE VENERABLE FATHER PETER OF KORISHE

Peter was born in the village of Korishe beyond the monastery of St. Mark near Prizren. (According to another legend, he was from a village near Pec). As a young man, he plowed with a one-eyed ox. Peter was exceptionally meek and mild tempered. He withdrew at an early age to lead a life of asceticism, as did his sister Helen. He mortified himself very strictly and persistently. In difficult combat with demonic temptations, Peter proved himself victorious. He was a teacher to the many monks who gathered around him. Fleeing from the glory of men, he hid himself for a period of time by the Black river where, later on, St. Joanicius of Devich lived a life of asceticism. Peter died in old age in his cave at Korishe. The night in which he died a light from many candles was seen in his cave and angelic singing was heard. This saint probably lived in the thirteenth century. Over his miracle-working relics Tsar Dusan built a church, which was a dependency (metoch) of Hilendar. In more recent times the remains of the relics of St. Peter were secretly translated to the Black river where they repose today.

6. BLESSED CONSTANTINE, METROPOLITAN OF KIEV

In the days of Blessed Prince Igor when there was great litigation and confusion among the Russian princes, there was also disorder in the Church and frequent changes on the thrones of the hierarchs. Thus, after the death of Metropolitan Michael of Kiev, Prince Izyaslav brought the famous and learned monk Klim as metropolitan not seeking the blessing of the patriarch of Constantinople, contrary to the age-old tradition. Thus, the patriarch sent Metropolitan Constantine to investigate the matter. Constantine removed Klim and banished all those clerics from the Church that he had ordained. Because of this the people were divided; some adhered to Klim and others adhered to Constantine. Then, according to the wishes of the Russian princes, the patriarch sent a third, Theodore, and both Klim and Constantine were removed. When Constantine died in the year 1159 A.D. they opened his will and in it he requested that he not be buried but that his body be thrown in the field to be consumed by dogs because he considered himself the culprit responsible for the confusion in the Church. Not daring to disobey his testament, nevertheless, with great horror men took the body of the metropolitan and tossed it into the field where it lay for three days. For three days it thundered terribly over Kiev, lightening flashed all around, thunder struck and the earth quaked. Eight men perished from the thunder. Three fiery pillars appeared over Constantine's lifeless body. Seeing all of this, the prince of Kiev ordered that the body of Constantine be taken and honorably buried in the church where the tomb of Igor was located. Immediately following, a calm ensued in nature. Thus God justified His humble servant.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ANOUB

Anoub, in just three dark nights,
Then, to God you will go for reckoning;
Relate to us a useful word!
Three elders asked him, the three together.
Anoub, to the elders replied:
To persecution, I was exposed
For the honorable Cross and for the True Faith,
To the Lord I wanted to offer my head,
But from that, the Lord turned me
To me the martyr's wreath, He did not want to give.
Never, the earthly seek from God
With every good, the Lord has eased me,
Radiant angels, to me appeared,
To me, they brought heavenly food.
Whatever I asked of God, I received,
Many mysteries I saw and comprehended,
I saw the heavens and the faces of angels,
Apostles, saints, martyrs,
Holy and joyful, heavenly faces.
And Paradise wonderful, wonderful and sweet.
I saw Hades and the torments of sinners,
And all the dark satanic hosts.
A lie from my lips, I never uttered,
All earthly delights, I renounced,
The face of Christ, for me, shines greater than the sun
Forgive me elders, Anoub the sinner!

REFLECTION

Do not ever violate the fast on Wednesday and Friday. This fast is commanded by the Church and is well explained. If you have ever in your life violated this fast, pray to God that He forgives you and sin no more. The holy and pious men do not consider themselves dispensed from this fast either during a journey, much less even in sickness. St. Pachomius met some men carrying a corpse and he saw two angels in the funeral procession. He prayed to God to reveal to him the mystery of the presence of the angels at the burial of this man. What good did this man do that the holy angels of God accompanied him in procession to the grave? According to God's Providence, both angels approached Pachomius and, in this manner, explained to him: "One of the angels is the angel of Wednesday and the other is the angel of Friday. Seeing how this man always, even until death, fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays so we are honorably accompanying his body. As he, until death, kept the fast, so we are glorifying him."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the paralytic: **"And, behold they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy: ' Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you' " (St. Matthew 9:2):**

1. How the good Lord restored health to the paralytic saying to him: **"Arise and walk!" (St. Matthew 9:6);**
2. How the Church brings my palsied [paralytic] soul before the Lord, that the Lord may restore it to health if only I desire it.

HOMILY

-About the justification of almsgiving-

"Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it" (Proverbs 3:27).

The Lord does not deny you that which you need, neither should you deny the man whom the Lord has sent to encounter you in order to test your heart. If a beggar extends his hand to you for help once in your life, give to him and do not refuse. Remember how many years there are in your life and how many are the hours in a day and how many are the minutes in an hour-every minute of so many, many thousands of days you extend your hand to the Lord and the Lord gives and does not refuse. Remember the mercy of God and your lack of mercy will burn you as a live coal and it will never give you any peace until you repent and soften your heart.

Do not ever say: "These beggars annoy me!" So many millions of men live on earth and all are beggars before the Lord; emperors as well as laborers, the wealthy as well as servants, all are beggars before the Lord and the **Lord never said:** "These beggars annoy me!" O man, give thanksgiving to God that someone seeks something good from you, be it material, or spiritual! This means that you are a man of God's trust: God has entrusted some of His goods to you because all goods belong to God. Show yourself worthy of this trust, show yourself worthy in lesser things so that you may be entrusted with greater things.

O Lord, most rich, soften our hearts and enlighten our understanding that we may be merciful in the goods which You, the All-merciful, have entrusted to us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE BESSARION

Bessarion was born and educated in Egypt. He dedicated himself to the spiritual life at an early age and "did not stain his spiritual garment in which he was clothed at baptism." He visited St. Gerasimus by the Jordan and learned from St. Isidore of Pelusium. He subdued his body through extreme fasting and vigils but he concealed his life of mortification from men as much as possible. At one time, he stood for forty days at prayer, neither eating nor sleeping. He wore one garment both in summer and winter. He possessed the great gift of miracle-working. He did not have a permanent dwelling place but lived in the mountains and forests until a ripe old age. He healed the sick and worked many other miracles for the benefit of the people and to the glory of God. He died peacefully in the year 466 A.D.

2. VENERABLE HILARION, THE NEW

Hilarion was the abbot of the Dalmatus monastery in Constantinople. He was a disciple of Gregory of Decapolis and an imitator of the life of Hilarion the Great whose name he took. Hilarion was powerful in prayer, persevering and courageous in suffering. He suffered much for the sake of icons at the time of the evil iconoclastic emperors, Leo the Armenian and others. Later, the Emperor Leo was slain by his own soldiers in the same church and on the same spot where he first ridiculed holy icons and from which he removed the first icon. St. Hilarion was then released from prison but only for a short time. Again, he was tortured and detained in prison until the reign of the right-believing Empress Theodora. Hilarion was clairvoyant and a discerner. He saw the angels of God as they were taking the soul of St. Theodore the Studite to heaven. Pleasing God, he fell asleep and entered the Kingdom of God in the year 845 A.D. in his seventieth year.

3. THE VENERABLE FEMALE MARTYRS ARCHELAIS, THECLA AND SUSANNA

As pure and virginal nuns, Archelais, Thecla and Susanna lived a life of asceticism in an unknown monastery near Rome. When the persecution of Christians began under the evil Emperor Diocletian, they fled to Campania and settled near the town of Nola. They could not conceal their holy lives from the people and the people began to come to them from the surrounding settlements seeking advice, instruction and assistance for various difficulties and infirmities. They were finally captured by the pagans and brought to trial. They openly and freely confessed their faith in Christ. When Leontius, the judge, asked St. Archelais about the Faith of Christ she replied: "By the power of Christ I trample on the power of the devil, I teach the people with understanding that they may know the One True God and by the Name of the Lord, my Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, through me, His handmaid, is given restoration of health to all who are sick." All three virgins were flogged, had boiling pitch poured over them, were exhausted by hunger in prison and finally beheaded. When they were led to the scaffold, an angel appeared to them whom some of the executioners saw and were so frightened that they could not raise their swords against the holy virgins. However, the holy virgins encouraged the executioners to carry out their duty. And thus as lambs, they were slain in the year 293 A.D. and entered the Kingdom of Christ that they may rest and receive delight in gazing upon the face of God in eternity.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT BESSARION

Bessarion holy, without roof and bread,
From childhood to the grave, his chastity preserved:
Bodily purity and purity of mind,
Therefore, with power and wisdom, was he overly-filled,
Divine wisdom and power divine,
Joyful in the spirit, without profound sorrow,
Without profound sorrow and without darkened thoughts
A pure and discerning mind as a crystal luminous.
When Divine Love in his heart, he rekindled,
He, many and glorious miracles performed:
Over the water walked as on dry land,
And a terrible whip was he, to every darkened spirit,
He stopped the sun and delayed evening,
And what he said by mouth, everything became a deed.
In him, the power of God worked
For he, to God in everything, was obedient.
Miraculous saint, help even us
By your prayers, before the throne of God!

REFLECTION

Malicious joy is a sordid garment which our spirit sometimes dons with great satisfaction. The very moment that you rejoice in the sinful fall of your brother you have also fallen to the joy of the devil who, with one hook, snared two fish. Brotherhood, according to the flesh, is a great bond but brotherhood, according to the spirit, is even greater. When you are grieved by the sin of a brother according to the flesh, why then would not the sin of a brother according to the spirit grieve you? When you conceal the sin of a brother according to the flesh why do you, with malevolent joy proclaim the sin of your brother according to the spirit? Who are your brothers according to the spirit? All Christians - all those who communicate with you from the one and the same Chalice, the one and the same life. O, how great were the saints in their brotherly love! O, how far away from them was malevolent joy! The following is said about St. Bessarion: on one occasion all the monks were gathered in church for prayer. The abbot approached a monk who had committed a sin and ordered him to leave the church. The monk started to leave and Bessarion followed him saying: "And I, also, am the same kind of sinner!"

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous resurrection of Jarius' daughter: **"While He was saying these things to them, an official came forward, knelt down before Him, and said, 'My daughter has just died. But come, lay Your hand on her, and she will live.' Jesus rose and followed him, and so did His disciples. A woman suffering hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the tassel on His cloak. She said to herself, 'If only I can touch His cloak, I shall be cured.' Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, 'Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you.' And from that hour the woman was cured. When Jesus arrived at the official's house and saw the flute players and the crowd who were making a commotion, He said, 'Go away! The girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they ridiculed Him. When the crowd was put out, He came and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose. And news of this spread throughout all that land"** (St. Matthew 9:18-26):

1. How the Lord assures the people that the maiden is not dead but that she is sleeping;
2. How He took her by the hand and the maiden arose alive;
3. How the Lord can resurrect my soul, dead from sin, by one touch of His Holy Life-giving Spirit.

HOMILY

-About guarding of the heart-

"With closest custody, guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

In the heart is the will, in the heart is love, in the heart is understanding, in the heart is the face of the All-holy and Divine Trinity. The heart is the home of the Father, the altar of the Son and the workshop of the Holy Spirit. God wants the heart: **"My Son, give me your heart" (Proverbs: 23:26)**. Let the mountains be overturned, let the seas dry up, let your friends abandon you, let your wealth fail you, let your body be consumed by worms, let the world pour upon you all the ridicule which it has but be not afraid; only guard your heart, guard and affix it to the Lord and give it to the Lord. From the heart comes life; from where does life in the heart come if the breath of the Lord and Source of Life, God, does not dwell in it?

"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (St. Matthew 12:35). These are the words of the Lord Who fills the treasury of your heart with His riches. What is that "good man?" That is the good treasure of the heart. What is that "evil man?" That is the evil treasure of the heart. **"For out of the heart [of an evil man] proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (St. Matthew 15:19)** and from the good heart proceeds **"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23)**. Do you see how great a warehouse is the heart of man? Do you see what all can fit in the heart of man? O brother, God the Holy Spirit Himself, when it pleases Him, can fit in the heart of man. Not only can He, but He will. He only waits for you to prepare your heart for Him. To convert it into a temple, for God the Holy Spirit only dwells in a temple. Just as a serpent protects its head so you, also son, guard your heart. Above everything that is guarded, son, guard your heart! For in the heart enters life and from it proceeds life, life which is from the Living God.

O Life-giving Lord, help us to guard our heart for You, for You the Lord!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JUNE - 7 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR THEODOTUS OF ANCYRA

This martyr of Christ was secretly a Christian and, as such, helped the Church and honorably buried the bodies of the holy martyrs. Thus, he buried the bodies of seven maidens who suffered for Christ. When the pagans found out about him, they subjected him to tortures and killed him (for more about St. Theodotus see May 18).

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYRS CYRIACA, VALERIA AND MARIA

All three of these female martyrs were from Caesarea in Palestine. When a persecution of Christians began, they withdrew from the city to a hut and there they prayed unceasingly to God, fasting and weeping that the Faith of Christ might be spread throughout the entire world and that the persecution of the Church cease. As a result of slander, they were brought to trial, tortured and in their torments were put to death in the year 304 A.D. Thus, these glorious virgins were crowned with the wreaths of martyrdom.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR MARCELLUS, POPE OF ROME

During the reign of Maximian, Marcellus was condemned to tend cattle in a designated place. In order to please Diocletian, who had taken him as co-emperor, Maximian began to construct public baths in Rome, the so-called Thermae, and forced the Christians to work on this project, as the one-time pharaoh did to the Hebrews in Egypt. Many Christians perished at this time. Also martyred was the Deacon Cyriacus who possessed great power over demons and who healed Artemia, the demonical daughter of Diocletian, as well as Jovia, the daughter of the Persian emperor, and baptized both of them. Also martyred was Artemia, the deacons Sisinius, Smaragdus and Largius, companions of Cyriacus, the deacon Aphronianus, two newly-baptized Roman soldiers, Papius and Maurus, and the elder Saturninus, Crescentianus and the blessed virgins Priscilla and Lucina who, from their wealth, built a cemetery for the slain Christian martyrs. St. Marcellus, the Pope, tended cattle for a long time and finally from starvation, humiliations and the fury of the soldiers gave up his soul to God and died.

4. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR MARCELLINUS, POPE OF ROME

Marcellinus was the predecessor of Pope Marcellus on the Roman throne. When Emperor Diocletian summoned him and threatened him with torture, Marcellinus offered sacrifice to the idols for which the emperor presented him with a precious garment. But Marcellinus bitterly repented and began to lament day and night because of his denial of Christ as Peter the Apostle once did. At that time, an assembly of bishops was held in Campania. The pope dressed in sackcloth poured ashes over his head and entered the assembly and, before all, confessed his sin begging them (the bishops) to judge him. The fathers said that he should judge himself. Then Marcellinus said: "I deprive myself of my priestly rank, for which I am not worthy, and even more, do not allow my body to be buried after death but let it be thrown to the dogs!" Having said this, he pronounced a curse on the one who would dare bury him. After that, Marcellinus went to the Emperor Diocletian, threw down the precious garment before him and confessed his faith in Jesus Christ and scorned the idols. The enraged emperor ordered Marcellinus to be tortured and afterwards they killed him outside the city together with three good men: Claudius, Cyrinus and Antoninus. The bodies of these three men were buried immediately but the body of the pope lay there for thirty-six days. Then, St. Peter appeared to the new pope Marcellus and ordered that the body of Marcellinus be buried saying: "**He who humbles himself shall be exalted**" (St. Luke 18:14).

5. THE VENERABLE DANIEL OF SCETIS

Daniel was the abbot of the famous Egyptian Scete. He was a disciple of St. Arsenius and a teacher of many. Many of his words and teachings are as guiding stars for monks. Once, when the barbarians attacked the Scete, the brethren called him to flee together with them. He answered them: "If God does not care about me, what is the purpose of living?" Daniel also said: "Insomuch as your body becomes obese, in the same manner your soul becomes emaciated." He lived a communal life of asceticism for forty years and after that withdrew to the wilderness in the year 420 A.D. He happened to be in Alexandria when a wicked father-in-law killed his daughter-in-law, St. Thomais (April 13), because of her chastity and Daniel, with his disciple, buried this martyr.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MARCELLINUS

O sinner, cast out despair,
And to God, offer repentance,
Despair to the devil, rejoicing.
Behold, Marcellinus, a hierarch was,
And to torture, they led him
He, before the emperor, betrayed the Lord,
But to despair, himself did not give,
But the terrible sin openly confessed
And by his blood gloriously washed it away.
O sinner, do not despondent become
And as a serpent, sins do not conceal,
Sin concealed, serpent in the bosom!
The heart of furtive sinners, it eats.
Peter sinned and quickly cast away sin.
That is how true sinners do,
When an apostle and pope sinned
And were forgiven by God,
How then for you, can there not be forgiveness,
Only repent, but without being late.
Bitter death can make you late
And from God, separate you forever.
Quickly, quickly, cast out despair,
And quickly offer repentance!

REFLECTION

Among the saints exists a very sharp [acute] conscience. That which average people consider a minor sin, the saints consider to be a great transgression. It is said of the Abba Daniel that on three occasions robbers captured him and took him into the forest. Fortunately, on two occasions he saved himself from slavery but the third time when he wanted to escape, he struck one of them with a stone, killed him and fled. This murder preyed on his conscience as heavy as lead. Perplexed as to what he should do, he went to the Alexandrian Patriarch Timothy, confessed to him and sought advice. The patriarch consoled him and absolved him from any epitimija [penance]. But his conscience still worried him and he went to the pope in Rome. The pope told him the same thing as did Patriarch Timothy. Still dissatisfied, Daniel visited in succession the other patriarchs in Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem confessing to all of them and seeking advice. But, he remained unsatisfied. Then he returned to Alexandria and declared himself to the authorities as a murderer. The authorities arrested him. When the trial was held before the prince, Daniel related everything that had happened and begged to be killed in order to save his soul from eternal fire. The prince was amazed at all of this and said to him: "Go, Father, and pray to God for me even though you kill seven more!" Dissatisfied with this, Daniel then decided to take a leperous man into his cell and to serve him until his death and when this one dies to take another. Thus he did and so, in this manner, quieted his conscience.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the woman with the issue of blood:

"And, behold a woman which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him and touched the hem of His garment. For she said within herself, if I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned around and when He saw her, He said, daughter, be a good comfort; your faith has made you whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour" (St. Matthew 9:20-22):

1. How, with great faith, the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of the garment of the Lord Jesus and was made whole;
2. How my soul is also like a woman with the issue of blood as long as it is a slave to the flesh and blood;
3. How, with one touch by Christ the Lord, my soul can be healed and spiritualized.

HOMILY

-About emulating the ant-

"Go to the ant, O sluggard, study her ways and learn wisdom" (Proverbs 6:6).

It is the will of the Creator who sent us into this world that we work as long as we are in this world. The Lord Jesus Himself commanded: "Work; Keep Watch!" He praises those who multiply their given talents and condemns the slothful who bury their talents. He calls His time on earth, service and says that He did not come to be served but to serve. He uses as an example His Heavenly Father and says: **"My Father works even until now, and I work" (St. John 5:17)**. He commands His disciples: **"Work while you still have light."**

O what a terrible shame for man when an ant, an irrational creature, is used to emphasize an example of diligence. But when man does not know how to look up to the diligence of God, it is necessary to direct him, at least, to emulate the ant. An ant works all summer and prepares food for itself for winter. Brethren, do we also prepare winter stores that we will open and display after death? O, may we not come with empty hands before Him Who, with full hands, gives to us as long as we are in this life.

Slothfulness is one of the deadly sins for it deadens the soul in man. A slothful soul is the nest of vices; the slothful soul is the habitation of the devils.

O Lord Almighty, You Who are, at the same time, all peace and all work, deliver us from destructive slothfulness and move us by Your Holy Spirit toward all good works for the sake of the salvation of our souls.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT EPHREM, PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH

During the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius, Ephrem was commander of the eastern regions. He was known to all for his great piety and charity and because of this was greatly respected. When it was necessary to rebuild Antioch, destroyed by earthquake and fire, the emperor assigned Ephrem the commander to direct this task. Ephrem fulfilled his duty with diligence and love. Among the ordinary masons was a bishop who, for unknown reasons, had left his episcopal see and labored as an ordinary laborer and no one knew that he was a bishop. One day he, with the other laborers, lay down to rest from the exhausting work and fell asleep. The commander Ephrem glanced at him and saw a fiery pillar rising from this man to the heavens. Amazed and frightened, Ephrem summoned this man and made him swear to tell him who he was. The man hesitated, but finally acknowledged that he is a bishop and prophesied to Ephrem that he will shortly be consecrated as patriarch of Antioch for the throne of the patriarchal see was vacant because the aged Patriarch Euphrasius perished in the earthquake. Indeed, Ephrem was elected and consecrated patriarch. Because of his goodness, purity and zeal for Orthodoxy, God gave him the great gift of working miracles. One time, in order to convince a heretic that Orthodoxy is true, he placed his pallium in a fire and prayed to God. His pallium remained in the fire for three hours and remained intact. Seeing this, the heretic was astonished and rejected the heresy. St. Ephrem died in peace in the year 546 A.D. and took up habitation in the Kingdom of God.

2. THE VENERABLE ZOSIMUS OF PHOENICIA

St. Zosimus was born in the village of Synda in the proximity of the town of Tyre. There he lived a life of asceticism in his monastery. Not having any cloud on his conscience, with his spirit he discerned things at a distance and knew what was happening in the world. Thus, he discerned and saw the destruction of Antioch by an earthquake and, weeping bitterly, prostrated himself on the ground and prayed to God that this city not be completely destroyed. Once it happened that a lion on the road killed and ate his donkey. The saint commanded the lion to serve him in place of the donkey and to carry his load. The lion showed himself meek as a lamb before the saint and accepted the load and bore it to the gate of Caesarea where Zosimus released and freed him. Saint Zosimus died peacefully in the sixth century.

3. THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR THEODORE STRATELATES

This saint is commemorated on February 8 and on that date his life is recounted. However, June 8 commemorates the translation of his relics from Heraklion to Euchaita. Before his martyrdom, Saint Theodore left the following instructions in his will to Varus his servant: 'Bury my body in Euchaita on the estate of my ancestors.' St. Anastasius of Sinai wrote about the miracle of the icon of St. Theodore: In the town of Karsat near Damascus, there was a church dedicated to St. Theodore Stratelates. When the Saracens conquered Damascus, a group of Saracens took up residence in this church with their wives and children. There was a fresco of the image of St. Theodore on the wall. One of the Saracens shot an arrow and struck the image of the saint in the face. At once blood flowed from the image. Soon after that, the entire group of those Saracens perished in the church. St. Anastasius said that he was personally in that church, saw the image of the saint on the wall and traces of congealed blood.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EPHREM

Saint Ephrem, brimming with piety,
Was a soldier against evildoers,
Against sinful heresies and the stupid
And for the Church that Christ purchased
By [His] Blood shed on the Cross,
By [His] Blood eternally glorified.
Ephrem guards the flock from wolves
And the nests of the spiders, he destroys.
Ephrem holy, chosen one of God,
A light in Antioch, he was,
The Church shown through his mouth
As at the time of the glorious Chrysostom,
God glorified His glorifier
By miraculous healing power.
Ephrem, the star in the glorious past,
Ephrem, the glory of the Orthodox Church.

REFLECTION

Fear in suffering and fear of not suffering -this is one and the same fear and it signifies the fear of a spiritual man as to whether or not God has distanced Himself from him. When St. Catherine suffered many and difficult tortures, our Lord appeared to her and she asked Him: 'Where were You until now, O Lord, to comfort me in so many sufferings?' The Lord answered her: 'I was here in your heart.' But as great a fear can come upon a spiritual man when, sufferings do not come his way for a long time. A monk once entered a church in Alexandria and saw a woman kneeling before the icon of the Savior and weeping tears cried out to the Lord: 'You have abandoned me O Lord, O Merciful One, have mercy on me!' Following the prayer the monk asked her: Who has wronged you that you so bitterly complain to God?' The woman replied: "Up to now, no one has wronged me, that is why I am weeping because God has abandoned me and for three years did not visit me with any sufferings. During this time, I was neither sick, nor my son, nor has any of my household livestock perished."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the two blind men: **"As Jesus moved on from there, two blind men came after Him crying out, 'Son of David, have Pity on us' " (St. Matthew 9:27):**

1. How the blind men cried out to the Lord in order that He open their eyes
2. How the Lord touched their eyes and did to them according to their faith and they saw;
3. How even the Lord can touch my blind soul and restore my spiritual sight if I cry out to Him in faith.

HOMILY

-About the King of kings-

"By Me kings reign and princes decree Justice. By Me princes rule and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. I love them that love Me" (Proverbs 8:15-17).

Let not a king think that he rules by his wisdom and power for he WM be mocked by the weak and the foolish. Let a ruler not think that he establishes justice among the people by his intelligence and will, that he not think foolishness, which is even absurd for children. Let princes, rulers and judges not think that they rule according to someone else's will and mercy contrary to God's will and mercy for all those who forget God will be fatally damaged upon the ice on which they are sliding. 'I love them that love Me,' says the Lord. This, the Lord speaks in the first place to the kings, princes and judges of mankind. For, if they love the Lord, they are very dear to the Lord. If they love the Lord, the people over whom they rule and judge will love Him also. And, if the people love the Lord, they will love their kings, princes and judges.

Inasmuch as a man is elevated by power and authority over people, so much closer should he be to God than the people over whom he is elevated.

O my brethren, the Lord was crucified on a Cross for us and, by this, He showed His love for us. He Who was crucified for us truly loves us more than he who merely rejoices with us at the table. And yet when we love so many of our friends with us at the table, how then should we not love Him Who, out of love for us, was crucified on the Cross?

O Blessed Lord, open for us our spiritual sight that we may see the entire immeasurable depth of Your love and that we may be inflamed with love toward You!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT CYRIL, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

Cyril was of noble birth and a close relative of Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, after whose death he was consecrated as patriarch. During his lifetime, he led three bitter struggles: with the Novatian heretics, with the heretic Nestor and with the Jews in Alexandria. The Novatianists had their origin in Rome and were named after Novatian the presbyter and leader of the heresy. They took pride in their virtues, walked about dressed in white garments, forbade a second marriage, held that prayers should not be said for those who committed a mortal sin, nor to receive back into the Church those who, at one time, had fallen away from the Church even though they bitterly repented. Cyril defeated them and drove them out of Alexandria together with their bishop. The struggle with the Jews was more difficult and bloodier. Since Alexander the Great founded that city, the Jews from the beginning, became strong in Alexandria. Their hatred toward Christians was vicious and insane. They killed Christians by treachery, by poisoning and by crucifying them on a cross. After a long and difficult struggle, Cyril succeeded with Emperor Theodosius the Younger to drive the Jews out of Alexandria. However, his struggle against Nestor, the Patriarch of Constantinople, was resolved at the Third Ecumenical Council [Ephesus 431 A.D.]. Cyril himself presided at this Council and, at the same time, represented Celestine the Pope of Rome at his request who was unable to attend the Council because of old age. Nestorius was condemned, anathematized and was banished by the emperor to the eastern boundary of the empire where he died a horrible death (for worms consumed his tongue by which he had blasphemed the Birth-giver of God calling her the Birth-giver of Christ). After the completion of this struggle, Cyril lived in peace and zealously tended Christ's flock. He presented himself to the Lord in the year 444 A.D. It is said that he composed the prayer: "Rejoice, O Virgin Birth-giver of God, Mary full of grace!" [The Hail Mary].

2. SAINT CYRIL OF WHITE LAKE [BELOE OZERO]

Cyril was born and educated in Moscow of an aristocratic family. He was tonsured a monk in Simonov Monastery where he lived a life of asceticism to the amazement of the other monks. In order to conceal his virtues, he pretended insanity. He personally spoke to St. Sergius of Radonezh and received many beneficial instructions from him. Against his wishes he was elected abbot of Simonov monastery. He prayed constantly to the All-Holy Birth-giver of God to show him the way whereby he could, in silence, live a life of asceticism. One night he saw a great light and heard a voice: "Cyril, depart from here and go to the White Lake!" And indeed, he departed from the Simonov Monastery with one companion and went to the vicinity of the White Lake and there, in the dense pine forest, began to live a life of asceticism. In time, this wilderness was transformed into a large monastery. The Venerable Cyril received the great gift of miracle-working from God and cured the sick and worked many other miracles. He died in the year 1429 A.D. in his ninetieth year and took up habitation with the Lord Whom he ardently loved his entire life.

HYMN OF PRAISE

ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Saint Cyril, unwavering
By his faith, amazes the universe,
With the honorable Cross, the hero encompassed himself
Against the enemies of the Church, took up arms,
Against the Jews, arch-enemies of the Cross,
And attacked the Novatianists,
Who took pride in themselves
To mercy, they placed a boundary,
Condemned sinners, prior to the Judgment,
To the power of God, they denied miracles.
But Cyril, shown the most
When he rose up against Nestorius,
The destroyer of the Orthodox Faith
The blasphemer of the Mother of God,
Cyril, the Mother of God, helped,
So that he overcame every diabolical power,
Holy Church cleansed of chaff,
All with the help of the Virgin Mother of God.
Cyril was a knight of Orthodoxy,
That is why the Church glorifies Cyril
And to him, prays without ceasing,
From diabolical uprisings, to protect us,
O Cyril, star among the stars,
By your prayers, help us.

REFLECTION

We sin if we consider it a duty to also hate those whom our relatives hate. This hatred passes on to us like a family sickness. In adopting the love of our relatives, we also adopt their hatreds. Sometimes even the great spiritual giants succumbed to that weakness. Patriarch Theophilus disliked St. John Chrysostom and remained his bitter enemy even until death. Saint Cyril, his kinsman and successor to the throne of Alexandria, inherited that hatred against Chrysostom the saint and, for a long time, bore this hatred within himself. In vain did Saint Isidore of Pelusium advise Cyril to change his opinion about Chrysostom and to enter his name in the Diptych of the Saints but Cyril could not change his evil will. Then the All-Holy Birth-giver of God, for whose glory and honor Cyril fought so much against Nestorius, appeared to Cyril in a vision with a multitude of angels and with John Chrysostom in great glory. The Holy and All-Pure One begged Chrysostom to forgive Cyril. Then Chrysostom approached Cyril, they embraced and kissed one another. This vision completely changed the feelings of Cyril toward Chrysostom and Cyril repented with shame because he unreasonably hated Chrysostom. That is why to his death Cyril did everything in order to highly praise Chrysostom as a great saint of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the dumb man possessed: **"As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a dumb man possessed with a devil" (St. Matthew 9:32):**

1. How the Lord cast out the devil from him and the dumb man spoke;
2. How the devil, with all his power, tries to make my soul dumb so that it does not glorify the Lord;
3. How the Lord, with one word, if I so desire, can cast out from me the unclean spirit and make me a harp of the glory of God.

HOMILY

-About those who love death-

"All they that hate Me love death" (Proverbs 8:35).

Thus speaks the Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, through His prophet. He who hates the wisdom of God, hates God and he who hates God what else is there for him to love except death? Is not everything outside of the Lord death? The sun and stars, the seas and mountains, animals and plants what is all of this except dead dust formed and enlivened by the power of God, the word of God, the wisdom of God?

He who does not love God, not only does he not love God but does not love anything that is from God, i.e., neither the beauty of the stars nor the order of the seas and mountains nor the living power that is in animals and plant life. He who does not love God, removes and distances God from nature. What else then is left? Only dead, formless, dark, dust only death. Even that dust is created by God. And that dust, the blasphemer of God must return to God and that, which is left over, he can love. What is there left over? Only that which does not touch God, i.e., death, sin and the devil. He who does not love God he, in essence, loves death, sin and the devil. Every blasphemer of God is a toy of the devil, the fruit of sin and a pawn of death.

If we despise You, O Loving Lord, we do not have anyone or anything to love. For that which we love on earth, we love because of You and the capability to love is from You. Foolish is he who loves the rays and despises the sun and who loves a drop of water and despises the spring.

Inspire us toward You by Your life-giving love, O our All-loving Lord.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR TIMOTHY, BISHOP OF BRUSSA

Because of Timothy's great spiritual purity, God granted him the gift of working miracles and he cured all diseases and afflictions of the people. During the reign of the wicked Emperor Julian, who denied Christ, Saint Timothy was cast into prison. Even in prison the faithful visited him in order to listen to the wise instruction of their arch-shepherd. Learning of this, Julian ordered and the executioner beheaded Timothy in prison in the year 362 A.D. His soul departed into Paradise and his relics remained miracle-working to help the people and to manifest the power of God.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ALEXANDER AND ANTONINA

Both Alexander and Antonina were from Alexandria. Antonina was an honorable virgin and Alexander an imperial soldier. They were both Christians. Antonina was first brought to trial and tortured. When they cast her into prison, Alexander, by the command of an angel of God, went to the prison (even though until now he did not know Antonina), covered her with his military mantel and said to her to lower her head and to pass through the guards before the gates. And so the virgin escaped and the soldier Alexander remained in prison. Then they brought Alexander before the judge and began to torture him for the Name of Christ. Hearing about this Antonina herself appeared before the judge who then subjected both of them to various tortures. He severed their hands, flogged their naked bodies, burned their wounds with candles and, finally, threw them into a fire which was started in a pit and covered them with dirt. They suffered honorably for the sake of the love of Christ and took up habitation in the mansions of the Heavenly King on May 3, 313 A.D. Festus, the evil judge, at the moment of the death of the martyrs, became dumb and an evil spirit seized and tormented him for seven days and killed him.

3. SAINT BASSIAN, THE BISHOP OF LODI

Bassian was born a pagan in Syracuse of prominent and wealthy pagan parents. He was educated in philosophy in Rome. By his earnest desire, he was baptized by the pious Elder Gordianus. This offended his parents and, to escape their wrath, and according to the command of Saint John the Theologian, who appeared to him, Bassian traveled to Ravenna and reported to Bishop Ursus, his kinsman. At the advice of the bishop, Bassian took up residence at the church of the Holy Martyr Apollinarius, outside the city. There he lived a long life of asceticism, of labor, of fasting and of prayer. When the bishop of the city of Lodi in Liguria died, Bassian was elected according to a revelation in a dream even though he did not desire it. He was consecrated bishop by Ambrose of Milan and Ursus of Ravenna. Bassian possessed the great gift of healing and could also resurrect the dead. Bassian was present at the final moments of Saint Ambrose and heard from his mouth how he sees the Lord Jesus Christ. Bassian lived in labor and asceticism to an old age and in the ninetieth year of his life died and was translated into the Kingdom of God about the year 409 A.D. Bassian's holy relics remained miracle-working to witness to the power of God and the greatness of God's saints.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT BASSIAN

Saint Bassian, loved the Lord,
Bassian holy, to the Lord prayed,
Upon him, the merciful Lord bestowed Grace,
What all men do, Bassian discerned,
How the demons dance the evil dance,
And how, men to evil, they incite.
Once Bassian through the town walked,
Saw a merchant, as he falsely weighs,
And on the scale, stands the devil black,
And crookedly weighs and wrongly counts,
To the merchant it is dear, that all men he deceives
And with a few goods, makes a lot of profit!
Bassian holy, toward the store walks:
To the merchant cried out: Open your eyes!
Because of easy gain, O do not be glad,
Open your eyes behold your partner!
In that the merchant, his eyes were opened,
Noticed the devil and fell backward,
Filled with fear, filled with trembling,
All gain he saw was cursed.
Began to sob bitterly and before the saint knelt
To Bassian he said: Pray for me.
Repent ye, Repent! Bassian instructs him,
That your soul eternally does not suffer,
To his accomplice the devil, the money he gives,
But he [the devil] his soul seeks in return.

REFLECTION

It is not the same to eat your meal with a blessing and to eat it without a blessing. Every meal is the table of God, which God Himself has set for us. This is why it is necessary as a householder to thank God and to beg for His blessings. Blessed food is more tasty and more satisfying while unblessed food is untasty, unsatisfying and unhealthy. On one occasion, Emperor Theodosius the Younger went for a walk in the surroundings of Constantinople and seeing the hut of a monk stopped and visited. The elder asked the emperor would he desire something to eat? "I do," answered the emperor. The elder brought bread, oil, salt and water before the emperor. The emperor ate and drank and then asked the monk: "Do you know who I am?" "God knows who you are," replied the monk. "I am Emperor Theodosius." The monk bowed down before the emperor silently. The emperor said to him: "I am an emperor and am born of an emperor but, believe me, never in my life have I eaten so tastily as I have today with you." "And do you know why?" answered the elder. "Because," he continued, "we monks always prepare our food with prayer and blessing; it is from that, that bitter food for us is transformed into tasty; with you, however, food is prepared with much labor and you do not seek a blessing (from God) and because of that tasty food becomes tasteless."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the man with a withered hand: **"A man with a withered hand happened to be there and they put this question to Jesus, hoping to bring an accusation against him: 'Is it lawful to work a cure on the Sabbath?' " (St. Matthew 12:10):**

1. How the Lord said to the man with the withered hand: Stretch out your hand! And he stretched it out;
2. How even my hands are withered when I do not give charity. The Lord continually speaks to me: Stretch out your hand!

HOMILY

-About how that of which he is afraid, befalls the sinner-

"The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted" (Proverbs 10:24).

The wicked one fears imminent death, the thief fears the burglar, the murderer fears the sword, the proud one fears shame, the abductor fears hunger, the glutton fears sickness and the slanderer fears the judgment of truth. That which the wicked one fears is what will befall him.

The righteous one desires a pure conscience, good thoughts, peace, charity, love, truth, justice and meekness. God gives these to him even while he is here on earth. The righteous one desires the Kingdom of God, desires Paradise, desires the company of the angels and the saints and desires to reflect upon the face of God in life eternal. God gives all these to him when He calls him to Himself.

O how just is the Lord toward the wicked one and how All-benevolent He is toward the righteous one! That which the wicked one fears, the Lord permits to befall him and that which the righteous ones fears the Lord removes from him. Of what is the righteous one afraid? Only sin. God removes sin from the righteous one and directs his feet on the path to virtue; and God protects the righteous one from evil spirits, the sowers of sin and, by His grace, waters the seed of virtues in his heart.

O All-seeing Lord, protect us from the paths of the wicked, from the gain of the wicked and from the fear of the wicked! Help our wavering heart to become steadfast in the desire for that which is only pleasing to You. For that which is pleasing to You will, in the end, conquer and reign and everything else will be given over to decay and forgetfulness.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT BARTHOLOMEW, THE APOSTLE

Bartholomew was one of the Twelve Great Apostles. In all probability, it appears that Bartholomew and Nathaniel are one and the same person. He was a companion of the Apostle Philip and Philip's sister, the virgin Mariamna and, for some time, a companion of St. John the Theologian. Bartholomew preached the Gospel first throughout Asia and, after that, in India and finally in Armenia where he died a martyr's death. In Hierapolis, these holy apostles by prayer, caused the death of a large serpent which the heathens kept in their temple and worshipped. In this same city and, by prayer, they restored sight to Stachius who was blind for forty years. It was here that a mob rose up against them and they crucified Philip and Bartholomew (Bartholomew was crucified upside down). At this time, an earthquake occurred in which the evil judges and many people perished. Feeling that this was a punishment from God, many ran to remove the apostles from the crosses but Philip was already dead while Bartholomew was still alive. After this, Bartholomew went to India where he preached and translated the Gospel of St. Matthew into the Indian language. Following this, he entered Armenia where he cured the daughter of the king from insanity. But the envious brother of King Astyages seized God's apostle, crucified him on a cross, skinned him and finally beheaded him in Armenian Albanopolis [Derbend]. Christians honorably buried his body in a lead sarcophagus. Because many miracles occurred over his relics, the pagans took the sarcophagus and tossed it into the sea. But the water carried the sarcophagus to the Island of Lipara where Bishop Agathon, through a revelation in a dream, met and buried it in the church. St. Bartholomew, attired in a white garment, appeared in church to Venerable Joseph, the Hymnographer, blessed him with the Gospel that he may be able to sing spiritual hymns saying: "Let heavenly waters of wisdom flow from your tongue!" He also appeared to Emperor Anastasius (491-518 A.D.) and told him that he would protect the newly established town of Dara. Later, the relics of this great apostle were translated to Benevento and then to Rome. Great and awesome miracles have occurred over these relics.

2. SAINT BARNABAS, THE APOSTLE

Barnabas was one of the Seventy Apostles. He was born in Cyprus of wealthy parents from the tribe of Levi and studied together with Saul under Gamaliel. At first, he was called Joseph but the apostles then called him Barnabas, Son of Consolation, because he was exceptionally capable of comforting the souls of the people. After Saul's conversion, Barnabas was the first to introduce Saul to the apostles and after that, with Paul [Saul] and Mark he preached the Gospel in Antioch and throughout other places. In all probability, he was the first to preach in Rome and Milan. He suffered on the island of Cyprus at the hands of the Jews and was buried by Mark beyond the western gate of the town of Salamis with the Gospel of St. Matthew on his chest which he, by his own hand, had copied. His grave remained unknown for several hundred years and since many received healing from sickness on this spot, this place was called: "the place of health." At the time of Emperor Zeno and the Chalcedon Council [451 A.D.], the apostle appeared to Archbishop Anthemius of Cyprus on three successive nights in a dream and revealed to him the location of Barnabas' grave. That appearance of the apostle occurred exactly at the time when Peter, the power-hungry Patriarch of Antioch, sought that the church in Cyprus be under the jurisdiction of the throne of Antioch. After the appearance and discovery of the miraculous relics of the holy Apostle Barnabas, it was established that the church in Cyprus, as an Apostolic Church, should always be independent. Thus, the autocephaly of the Church in Cyprus was established.

3. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLY ICON AXION ESTIN, [DOSTOJNO JEST - IT IS TRULY MEET TO BLESS YOU]

AND THE MIRACLE THAT OCCURRED BEFORE IT DURING THE REIGN OF PATRIARCH NICHOLAS CHRYSOVERGES (983-996 A.D.)

The miracle consists of this: One night a monk was reading the Canon to the Holy Birth-Giver of God and was singing "More honorable than the Cherubim" in his cell in the monastery of the Pantocrator, now called "Axion Estin" after the icon. His elder had gone to Karyes. Suddenly a man appeared in church and began to sing: "Truly it is Meet." That hymn so far was unknown in the church. The monk upon hearing this hymn, became excited not only because of its contents but also because of the beautiful heavenly singing. "Among us, we sing it in this manner," said the elder to the monk. The monk wanted to have this hymn written down and brought a tablet on which the stranger wrote down this hymn with his finger as though upon wax. Suddenly he vanished. That stranger was the Archangel Gabriel. This tablet was taken to Constantinople and the hymn remains even today in the Church.

HYMN OF PRAISE

A MONK AT PRAYER

A monk at night, alone in church
With a fervent prayer, dispels darkness from his soul,
All at once, a monk arrived, about him, nothing unusual,
And, as an experienced cantor, began to chant.
Then, the first monk began: "More Honorable"
Glorifying the Mother of God, Mother "More Glorious".
To him, the miraculous guest spoke about this hymn of praise:
"Among us," said he: "this hymn we sing differently,
As you began, we do not begin,
Rather with "Truly it is Meet," venerable father!"
And the entire hymn: "Truly it is Meet" he uttered,
And the monk tried, not a word to omit.
Now I breathe easier, O my virtuous brother
Of your hymn, allow me to copy it!
But pencil he has not and not even paper has he,
The church a place for prayer is and not for writing!
Then the guest at midnight traced the church with a cross
And on the stone with his finger he began to write.
As on soft wax, on the stone he wrote,
At this man, the monk was amazed.
Of the unusual guest, the monk inquired: "Who are you?"
For you, may it be enough that my name is Gabriel.
At once he disappeared. The monk with horror
Recognized the Archangel in the monastic habit.
That which he wrote, no one erased
With heavenly fragrance, the church was filled.

REFLECTION

A true friend prays to God for his friend. A true friend is concerned about the salvation of the soul of his friend. To dissuade a friend from false paths and to direct him on the path of truth, that is precious friendship. The saints of God are the best friends of mankind. Two youths, Barnabas and Paul, were friends while together they were attending the school of Gamaliel. When Barnabas became a Christian, he persistently and tearfully prayed to God that He would also enlighten the mind and turn the heart of Paul in order that he becomes a Christian. Barnabas often spoke to Paul about Christ the Lord but Paul ridiculed him and considered him as one led astray. However, the Good Lord did not leave the prayers of Barnabas without fruit. The Good Lord appeared to Paul and turned him from the path of falsehood to the path of truth. The converted Paul then fell before the feet of his friend and cried out: "O Barnabas, teacher of truth, I am now convinced that everything which you spoke to me about Christ is the truth!" Barnabas wept with joy and embraced his friend. Barnabas, the friend saved the soul of his friend by his fervent prayer. If Barnabas has succeeded to place Paul as the emperor of Rome, he would have done less for him than what he succeeded in doing with prayer to bring him to the truth.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the blind-dumb man: **"Then was brought to Him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spoke and saw" (St. Matthew 12:22):**

1. How the Lord healed the man, blind and dumb;
2. How the Lord can instantly heal even my soul, blind and dumb because of my remoteness from Christ, only if I bring my soul to the Lord.

HOMILY

-About the master and the slave-

"He who spares his rod hates his son but he who loves him takes care to chastise him" (Proverbs 13:24).

God's love for men transcends the love of men for men as the heaven transcends the earth but, nevertheless, the Man-loving God chastises men. God chastises men not in order to destroy them but to correct and save them. O blessed chastisement which emanates from love! **"For whom the Lord loves, He chastises; and He scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6).** With what does God chastise? With a rod! What kind of rod? The rod of sickness, the rod of misfortune, the rod of loss, the rod of hunger, the rod of crop failure, the rod of drought, the rod of floods, the rod of death of relatives and friends, the rod of evil demons, when He permits them authority over man. These are the rods of God by which God chastises His children in order that He may correct them and bring them back to their senses, enlighten and save them.

Why should the parent not chastise his children if he truly loves them? The rod is a tool of great love and concern. If the child is not sensitive to spiritual chastisement, the child is sensitive to the rod. The more a child is insensitive to the spirit and conscience, it is more sensitive to the body. The body was not given to man that by itself it has meaning, but the body is to be a servant of the spirit to help the spirit and to benefit the spirit. If corporal punishment arouses the spirit in man and the spirit arouses the conscience, then the body has completely fulfilled its duty toward the spirit, its master. If the master [spirit] sleeps, then the servants are struck in order to arouse the master [the spirit]. If the servants awaken their master in the hour of danger, they will not lament the blows that they have received for they saved their master. And the awakened and saved master will know how to repay his servants. Hence, in truth, "He who spares his rod hates his son." Whosoever spares the servant, betrays the master.

O All-wise Lord, open the hearts of the parents that they may receive this holy instruction of Yours.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE ONUPHRIUS THE GREAT

For sixty full years, this saintly hermit had lived in the desert when the monk Paphnutius visited him. His hair and beard reached to the ground and his body, due to a long period of nakedness, was covered with long hair. All the hairs on him were as white as snow and his entire appearance glistened, sublime and awesome. Seeing Paphnutius, Onuphrius called him by name and related to him his life in the wilderness. His guardian angel appeared to him and brought him to this place in the wilderness. For a long time he fed only on vegetables which could rarely be found in the wilderness and after that, when he endured violent combat by the temptations of the demons and when his heart was completely strengthened in the love of God, an angel of God brought him bread for nourishment. Besides that, by the good Providence of God, a palm tree grew next to his cell which brought forth an abundant fruit of dates and a spring of living water began to flow there. However, Onuphrius said: "I mostly feed and quench my thirst on the sweet words of God." To Paphnutius' question: "How do you receive Communion?" The hermit answered that an angel of God brings him Holy Communion every Saturday and communicates him. The next day, the elder said to Paphnutius that this is the day of his departure from this world; he knelt on his knees, prayed to God and gave up his spirit to God. At that moment, Paphnutius saw a heavenly light as it illumined the body of the deceased saint and heard the singing of angelic hosts. Having honorably buried the body of Onuphrius, Paphnutius returned to his monastery that, as a living witness he narrate to others, for their benefit, the wondrous life of this man and the greatness of God's Providence about those who have completely given themselves over to the service of God. Onuphrius died in the year 400 A.D.

2. VENERABLE PETER THE ATHONITE

Peter was a Greek by birth and a soldier by profession. Once, in battle against the Arabs, Peter was captured, bound by chains and cast into prison. Peter remained imprisoned a long time in the town of Samara on the Euphrates river and he constantly prayed that God free him from prison and take him to some wilderness where he would dedicate himself completely to a life of prayerful asceticism. St. Simeon, the Receiver of God, with St. Nicholas appeared to him in prison, touched his iron chains with his staff and they melted like wax and Peter suddenly found himself in a field outside the town. He immediately set out for Rome where he was tonsured a monk by the pope himself at the tomb of St. Peter. After this he again departed by boat for the east. The All-Holy Birth-giver of God along with St. Nicholas appeared to him in a dream and the Birth-giver of God said to St. Nicholas that she designated Mt. Athos for a life of asceticism for Peter. Up to this time, Peter had never heard of the Holy Mt. Athos. Disembarking, therefore, on the Holy Mountain, Peter settled in a cave where he remained for fifty-three years in difficult mortifications, in a struggle with hunger and thirst, with heat and cold and mostly with the powers of the demons until he overcame all with the help of God. After he endured the first temptations and successfully passed the first difficult tests before God, an angel of God began to bring him bread every forty days. On several occasions, the tempting devil appeared to him under the guise of an angel of light but Peter repelled him with the sign of the cross and the name of the All-Holy Birth-giver of God. About a year before his death he was discovered by a deer hunter around Athos and from the mouth of the saint heard his life story. He died in the year 734 A.D. His relics were translated to Macedonia.

3. VENERABLE TIMOTHY, THE EGYPTIAN HERMIT

Timothy first lived a life of asceticism in Thebaid and then withdrew into the wilderness where he lived for thirty years. Pleasing God, he died peacefully.

4. THE VENERABLE BASSIAN AND JONAH

Bassian and Jonah were monks of the Solovetz Monastery. They drowned and were washed ashore in the year 1651 A.D. Over their graves a sign appeared and because of that a church was built. Later on, Petrominsk Monastery was established there. Once when Emperor Peter the Great was saved from a tempest, he remained there for three days and made a cross and implanted it on the shore.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PETER OF ATHOS

Saint Peter in the awesome wilderness,
Of all earthly riches, deprived
And the rich illusions of the devil,
Through tearful prayers, overcame all,
The heart he harnessed and to God raised it,
The mind he straightened and to heaven uplifted it,
Immobile as a rock among the cliffs,
Wearied by hunger and all-night vigils,
Directed himself toward every good
As bodiless in an earthly body.
On Mt. Athos, half a century
In prayer speaks only with God,
From age he turned as white as snow,
Neither man he saw, neither wanted he to.
To him, God revealed the window of heaven,
Countless miracles, Peter saw,
The Mother of God, God's angels.
And the all-wonderful saints of God.
To him the Lord an angel sent,
To him, gave Holy Communion from heaven,
Until, a spiritual giant Peter of himself created
As a certain city on a high mountain.
To be a teacher throughout the ages,
To the holy monks, a wonderful example.

REFLECTION

Great and wonderful is the Mystery [Sacrament] of Holy Communion. Even the anchorites [recluses] and hermits craved for nothing else as much as to be given the possibility to receive Holy Communion. St. Mary the Egyptian begged St. Zosimus to bring her the Holy Mystery on the Jordan and to communicate her. Returning from visiting St. Onuphrius, Venerable Paphnutius found a humble community of four young ascetics in the desert. When Paphnutius asked them whether and how do you receive Holy Communion, they replied that an angel of God visits them every Saturday and Sunday and administers them Holy Communion. Paphnutius remained until the first following Saturday and was personally convinced. When Saturday dawned, the entire community was filled with an indescribable wonderful fragrance and while they were at prayer, an angel of God in the form of a handsome young man, as bright as lightning, appeared with the All-pure Mysteries. Paphnutius became frightened and out of fear fell to the ground. But they raised him up and brought him to the angel that he, along with them, receive Communion from the hand of the angel. According to his own testimony, St. Onuphrius received Holy Communion from the hand of an angel as did many other anchorites and hermits. Therefore, it is completely erroneous to think that solitaries and hermits did not receive Holy Communion. God Who provided for their bodily nourishment did not leave them without the Life-giving nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ the Lord.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous multiplying of the bread in the wilderness: **"And when it was evening, his disciples came to Him saying: This is a desert place, and the time is not past; send the multitude away that they may go into the villages and buy themselves victuals" (St. Matthew 14:15):**

1. How the Lord fed five thousand people with the five blessed loaves;
2. How He is that Living Bread who alone can miraculously feed my hungry soul, which the whole of the rest of the world together cannot feed.

HOMILY

-About the palace and the hut-

"The house of the wicked shall be overthrown but the hut of the righteous shall flourish" (Proverbs 14:11).

The palace of Herod lay in ruins and the cave of the Child of Bethlehem remains. The crowns of the Casesars have been lost but the bones of the martyrs have been preserved. The palaces of the pagan kings have been transformed into piles of stone and dust but the caves of the ascetics have grown into most beautiful churches. The golden idols have been scattered into nothing and the chains of the Apostle Peter are preserved as a holy relic. The powerful Roman Empire is now only a tale of the dead, while the hut of Christianity, the Holy Church is today the most powerful empire in the world. Where are the Jews, the murders of God? They are dispersed throughout the world. Where are the powerful Romans? In the grave. Where is the power of bloody Nero? Where is the power of the evil Diocletian and the depraved Maximian? Where is the success of Julian the Apostate? Where are those high towers? They are where the tower of Babel is - beneath the dust and ashes, beneath shame and damnation.

Go about your own city and inquire how many homes of the godless are excavated? How many huts of the righteous grew into beautiful houses? Brethren, heaven and earth are founded on justice, on God's steadfast justice. That is why every pagan creation is as arrogant air bubbles, which burst and are trampled on by passers-by. The palaces of the pharaohs and Babylonians are as trampled bubbles and the tent of the righteous Abraham flourishes and blossoms in eternity. O my brethren, how all-powerful and long lasting is justice and how rumbling and transient is injustice like a storm on a summer's day!

O Righteous Lord, how magnificent and consistent are You in the exercising of Your justice.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR AQUILINA

Aquilina was born in the Palestinian town of Byblus of honorable Christian parents. At age seven, little Aquilina was already completely versed in the true Christian life and at age ten she was so filled with divine understanding and the grace of the Holy Spirit that she, with great power and zealously, preached Christ to her female companions. When Diocletian's persecution began, someone accused Aquilina before Volusian, the imperial deputy, who was more like a beast than a man. At first, Volusian ordered that Aquilina be flogged and after that, a red hot rod be pierced through her ears and brain. Until the last moment, the virgin Aquilina freely and openly confessed Christ the Lord and when her brain and blood began to flow from her head, she fell as though dead. The deputy, thinking Aquilina was indeed dead, ordered her body to be carried outside the city and thrown upon a dung heap for the dogs to consume. But, an angel of God appeared to her at night and said to her: "Arise, and be whole!" And the virgin arose and was whole and for a long time she offered up praise of thanksgiving to God imploring Him not to deprive her to fulfill her martyr's mortification. A voice from heaven was heard: "Go, it will be to you as you pray" and Aquilina set out for the town. The gates of the town opened on their own accord before her and she entered like a spirit into the palace of the deputy and appeared before his bed. The deputy was seized with unspeakable fear, seeing the virgin alive whom he thought was dead. The following day, according to his command, the executioners led Aquilina out to behead her. Before her beheading, the virgin Aquilina prayed to God on her knees and gave up her soul. The executioner beheaded her lifeless head. Her relics gave healing to many of the sick. Aquilina was twelve years old when she suffered for the Lord: suffered and crowned with the martyr's wreath in the year 293 A.D.

2. SAINT TRIPHYLLIUS, BISHOP OF LEUCOSIA [NICOSIA] IN CYPRUS

Triphyllius was a disciple of St. Spiridon and later his worker on the island of Cyprus. He was a merciful man, pure in thought and chaste throughout his life, "a living fountain of tears" and a great ascetic. He governed Christ's flock well and dying, received the wreath among the great hierarchs in the heavens. He died peacefully in the year 370 A.D.

3. SAINT ANNA AND HER SON JOHN

Taken as an orphan into the home of a nobleman and cared for as an adopted daughter, Anna was raised and educated in that home. As a worthy maiden, this nobleman wed her to his son. When the elder nobleman died, the relatives pressed his son to release his wife because of her lowly birth and to marry another whom, according to origin and wealth, would be more suitable for him. The nobleman's son feared God and did not want to do this. Seeing her husband in conflict with his relatives, Anna secretly left him and fled to a distant island where there was not a living soul. Arriving at this island pregnant and soon to bear a child, Anna lived a life of asceticism for thirty years in fasting and prayer. Then, according to God's Providence, a hieromonk landed on this island, baptized her son and gave him the name of John. This holy soul Anna lived a life of asceticism in the fifth century and died peacefully.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TRIPHYLLIUS

Saint Triphyllius while yet a deacon was he,
The Psalter and the Gospels he read;
And with a sweet voice, to the people he humbly read,
And Spiridon holy, attentively listened.
Once when in church, crowded with people
The chapter on the Paralytic he beautifully read,
How the gentle Lord, the sick one saw,
"Take up your pallet," said He and the sick one departed.
Triphyllius, the word pallet, with the word "lair" substituted,
Then, said Spiridon: "My son, come to me!"
How, my dear deacon, do you change words,
The word which our gentle Savior uttered?
The word pallet from His mouth came
And "lair" you said, His word you omitted!
My son, this is a Book from on High inspired,
Therefore, everything as it is written in it, let us read.
Full of power, the Gospel words are
And weak and decayed human words are.
The pallet of man is not the same as a "beastly lair,"
Therefore, my son, say God forgive me!
Triphyllius the deacon, his error realized,
Bitterly repented and was much ashamed.
Triphyllius blessed, because of his spiritual father
Saint Spiridon, glorious miracle-worker.

REFLECTION

Meekness and kindness adorned our saints and it gave them strength and understanding not to return evil for evil. When Emperor Constantius, the son of the Emperor Constantine the Great, became ill in Antioch he summoned St. Spiridon to offer prayers for him. St. Spiridon, in the company of Triphyllius his deacon departed Cyprus and arrived at Antioch before the imperial palace. Spiridon was clad in poor clothing. He wore a simple woven cap on his head, in his hand a staff from a palm tree and draped over his chest he bore an earthen vessel which contained oil that was taken from in front of the Honorable Cross (which at that time was the custom of Christians in Jerusalem to carry). So dressed and in addition to that, exhausted by fasting and prayer and the long journey, in no way did the saint reflect his rank and dignity. When he wished to step foot into the imperial palace, one of the emperor's servants, thinking him to be an ordinary beggar, struck him with his fist on the cheek. The meek and kind saint turned the other cheek to him. When, with great difficulty, he succeeded to reach the emperor, Spiridon touched the head of the emperor and the emperor recovered.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous walking of the Lord on water as on dry land: **"And when the apostles saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying: 'It is a spirit and they cried out in fear' " (St. Matthew 14:25):**

1. How the boat with the disciples was in trouble on the waves of the sea at night and how the Lord, seeing this, hastened to their help;
2. How even I am often in trouble from the darkness and the waves of passions and how the Merciful Lord hastens to help me in walking over passions as over a solid road.

HOMILY

-About the path of life and the path of death-

"Sometimes a way seems right to a man but the end of it leads to death!" (Proverbs 14:12).

It sometimes appears to man that the path of the godless is right for he sees that the godless obtains riches and succeeds. O, if it were only given to him to see the end of that path! He would be horrified and would never tread on that path.

If the end of a path terminates in destruction, can it be the right path? Therefore, O man, do not say that one path is right if you do not see its end. You ask: "How could I, a weak and shortsighted man, perceive the end of a long path?" In two ways: by reading Holy Scripture through the experience of the Orthodox Church and by observing the end of the path of life of those around you and those who die before you. However, the first path is the more reliable path and if you adhere to it, know that you will not stumble into the night of eternal death.

Only that path is right which is shown by God as right. All other paths that appear as right to your mind and do not coincide with the path of God are wrong and are deadly. Behold, even the beasts have their paths but would you travel those paths if they seemed right to you? Do not go, for in the end you will fall into the hungry jaws of the beasts. And the path shown by God, even if it appears wrong to you, is right - therefore travel by it. Because of our sins, the path of God occasionally seems wrong to us. If we were without sin and if our mind was not distorted by sin it would not be possible for us, even for a moment, to conceive that another path would be right except God's path. To a distorted mind many wrong paths seem right and the only right path as being wrong.

O All-seeing Lord, our Guide, correct our mind so as not to be detained on the wrong paths. Jesus, You are the only Path, Truth and Life and that which we fantasize apart from You is the wrong way, a lie and death.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET ELISHA

Elisha lived nine hundred years before Christ. When the Lord willed to take the aged Prophet Elijah to Himself, He revealed to him that He had designated Elisha, the son of Shaphat of the tribe of Reuben from the town of Abel-Meholah, as his successor in the prophetic service. Elijah informed Elisha of God's will and draped him with his mantle and implored from God the two-fold grace of prophecy for him. Elisha immediately departed his home and family and followed Elijah. When the Lord took Elijah in a fiery chariot, Elisha remained to continue the prophetic service with yet a greater power than Elijah.

By his purity and zeal, Elisha was equal to the greatest prophets and, by the miraculous power that was given to him by God, Elisha exceeded them all. He parted the waters of the Jordan as Moses once parted the Red Sea; the bitter waters in Jericho he made drinkable; he brought forth water into the excavated trenches during the war with the Moabites; he multiplied the oil in the pots of the poor widow; he resurrected the dead son of the Shunammite woman; he fed a hundred people with twenty small loaves of bread; he healed Commander Naaman of leprosy; he invoked leprosy upon his servant Gehazi because of his greed; he blinded the entire Syrian army and also forced another army to flee; he foretold many events to the people as well as to individuals. Elisha died at a very old age.

2. SAINT METHIDIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Methodius was born in the town of Syracuse in Sicily. After the completion of his secular studies, he was tonsured a monk and began to live a life of asceticism in a monastery. Patriarch Nicephorus took him into his service. During the reign of the iconoclastic emperors, he became widely known as a superb defender of the veneration of icons. For this, the wicked Emperor Theophilus exiled him to an island with two common criminals where he languished in a damp prison for seven years without light and without sufficient food as though in a grave. During the time of the pious Empress Theodora and her son Michael, Methodius was freed and was chosen as patriarch (according to an earlier prophecy of St. Joannicius the Great). The first week of the Great Fast [Lenten Season] Methodius solemnly carried the icons into the church and wrote a Canon in honor of icons. Unable to outwit him, the vile heretics hired a woman who declared that the patriarch had an impure relationship with her. The whole of Constantinople was horrified at this slander. Nevertheless, not knowing how he could otherwise prove his innocence, the patriarch overcame his embarrassment, removed his clothes and stood naked before the court which he himself had requested, and showed his withered body, debilitated from fasting. The court was clearly convinced that the patriarch had been slandered. Hearing of this, the people rejoiced and the heretics were shamed. Then, the woman admitted that she was persuaded and paid to bring this slander against the saint of God. Thus, those who thought to bring shame upon Methodius unintentionally increased his fame. This great confessor of the Faith died peacefully in the year 846 A.D. and took up habitation in the Kingdom of God.

3. SAINT JOHN, METROPOLITAN OF EUCHAITA

John was surnamed Mavron "The Black." He was a very educated man and, at the same time, a spiritual man. At the time of Emperor Alexius Comnenis, John in his old age, became the metropolitan of Euchaita. He is especially famous in that St. Basil, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom (January 30) appeared and explained to him how all three of them are equally glorified in heaven. After this vision the dispute among the people concerning who of the three saints was greater and who was lesser was quieted down. St. John also wrote the famous Canon to the Most Sweet Jesus and a Canon to the Guardian angel and, in addition to this, other beneficial writings. He died peacefully in the year 1100 A.D.

4. VENERABLE NIPHON

Niphon was born in the region of Argyrokastron in the village of Lukov. He was the son of a priest. From his youth he was attracted to solitude and prayer. That desire finally led him to Mt. Athos where he lived a life of asceticism, at first in the cave of St. Peter the Athonite and, after that, in the wilderness of St. Anne. He did not even want to eat bread but fed on vegetation and roots. Some envious ones accused him of loathing bread and from this accusation he easily and quickly justified himself. Finally, he became associated with St. Maximus of Kapsokalyvia. Because of his sincere love for God, Niphon was endowed with the gift of miracle-working and discernment. He healed the sick by his prayer and by anointing with oil and discerned events which had occurred and which will take place. About himself he prophesied that he would die during the Fast of Saint Peter [This fast precedes the feast of Saints Peter and Paul]. When the day of his death dawned, he said to the brethren assembled around him: "Do not weep, rather rejoice, for in me you will have an intercessor before God for your salvation." Finally, he said: "It is time for me to depart" and he gave up his holy soul to God on June 14, 1330 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE PROPHET ELISHA AND COMMANDER NAAMAN (2 KINGS 5)

**What do riches and this beautiful world help,
What all authority and power, when a man is leprous?
But the commander Naaman covered with leprosy,
From leprosy, completely white as though molded from pus.
But the commander, to the man of God hurries,
Only from him, just hoping for a cure,
With his entire caravan of clothes and gold,
This, for the man of God, let it be a reward!
Elisha said to him: to the Jordan go,
And in the water, seven times to bathe.
In his misfortune Naaman became angry:
A river more clear and larger, do we not have?
And quickly to his home, wanted to return,
But from that, his wise servant dissuaded him.
O Master he said: do not give up quickly,
Behold, Jordan is nearby; go and bathe!
Naaman hearkened to him and hastened toward Jordan
And in the river, seven times immersed.
Naaman became whole and the leprosy disappeared,
Naaman became whole and pure as a child,
God is One, the God of Israel, he cried out,
He performs glorious miracles in abundance!**

REFLECTION

The all-wise St. John Chrysostom said: "A place will not save us if we do not carry out the will of God." It is told of a monk who lived in a monastery where five brethren loved him and one brother offended him. Because of this one brother who offended him, he moved to another monastery. However, in this monastery eight of the brethren loved him and two of the brethren offended him. He then fled to a third monastery. But here, seven of the brethren loved him and five of the brethren offended him. He set out for a fourth monastery but along the way he thought: "How long will I flee from place to place? I will never find peace in the whole world. It would be better for me to become patient." He pulled out a piece of paper and wrote in bold letters: "I will endure all for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." When he entered the fourth monastery here also some love him and others offended him. But he patiently began to endure the offenses. As soon as someone offended him, he would take out that piece of paper and read: "I will endure all for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." So with patience he succeeded and all loved him and he remained in that monastery until his death.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord's miraculous walking on the water as though on dry land: **"But in the fourth watch of the night Jesus came to them walking upon the sea" (St. Matthew 14:25):**

1. How the Lord walking alone on top of the water called Peter also: **"And He said, Come!" (St. Matthew 14:29).** Peter sets out but because of little faith began to sink;
2. How the Lord also calls me to walk over the passionate dampness and tempest and how I set out but sink because of my little faith.

HOMILY

-About humility as a precursor of glory [honor]-

"...And humility goes before honors [glory]" (Proverbs 15:33).

Here, the word is about true glory and not false glory; about glory that is eternal and not about glory that dies. Glory that is of man is glory that dies, and glory that is of God is eternal. Those whom men glorified are not glorified and those whom God glorifies are glorified. Our Lord said to the Jewish scribes: **"How can you believe who receive glory [honor] from one another and do not seek the glory [honor] which is from the only God?" (St. John 5:44).** See how our Lord makes a distinction between the glory from men and the glory from God. And about Himself, He said: **"I do not receive glory from men" (St John 5:41).** He who seeks glory from men travels the path of pride and he who seeks glory from God travels the path of humility. No one is glorified by God without humility. The saints of God were the most humble servants of God. The Most Holy Birth-giver of God [Theotokos] was adorned with overwhelming humility. To her great humility, she ascribed her being chosen as the Mother of God: **"Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid" (St. Luke 1:48).** But the humblest of the most humble, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, was the founder of asceticism. During His earthly life, humility always preceded glory.

Brethren, it must also be that way in our life if we desire true glory. For if humility does not precede glory, glory will never come.

O Lord Jesus, Model and Teacher of humility, our only glory and the Glorifier of all the humble and meek, inspire us with Your inexpressible humility.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET AMOS

Amos was born in the village of Thecua near Bethlehem. He was of simple origin and life. Amos was a swine herdsman for a wealthy man of Jerusalem. But God Who does not look at who is who by his outward appearances but rather by the purity of his heart, and Who took both Moses and David from their sheep, and appointed them as leaders of the people, chose this Amos as one of His prophets. He rebuked King Uzziah and his pagan priests for idolatry and dissuaded the people from worshipping the golden calves in Bethel, teaching them to worship the One Living God. When the chief pagan priest persecuted Amos, he prophesied that the Assyrians will conquer Israel, that they will slay the king and the sons of Amaziah and that the Assyrian soldiers will defile Amaziah's wife before his eyes because he led the people into adultery with idols. All of this materialized. The son of a pagan priest struck the prophet on the forehead with his staff so forcefully that Amos fell. Barely alive, Amos was brought to his village of Thecua where he surrendered his holy soul to God. Amos lived in the eighth century before Christ.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS VITUS, MODEST AND CRESCENTIA

St. Vitus was born in Sicily of famous but non-believing parents. Modest was his teacher and Crescentia was his governess. St. Vitus was baptized at an early age and, at the age of twelve, withdrew to live a life of great mortification. Angels appeared to him, directed and strengthened him in his mortification and he, himself, was as radiant and beautiful as an angel of God. The hand of a judge who beat him withered but Vitus healed his hand through prayer. Seeing twelve radiant angels in his room "whose eyes were as stars and whose faces were as lightning," his father was blinded. Vitus, through prayer, restored his sight. When his father wanted to kill him, an angel appeared to Vitus and took him together with Modest and Crescentia to Lucania on the shore of the river Silaris. Here, Vitus worked many miracles over the infirm and the insane. At the request of Emperor Diocletian, Vitus traveled to Rome where he expelled an evil demon from the emperor's son for which the emperor did not reward him but, on the contrary, cruelly tortured him because he would not worship the dumb idols. However, the Lord delivered him from all torments and by His invisible hand translated him again to Lucania where he, Modest and Crescentia presented themselves to the Lord. The relics of St. Vitus are located in Prague, the Czech Republic.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR DOULAS

Doulas lived a holy life in a monastery in Egypt. One of his brethren, out of envy, accused him of sacrilege, the stealing of ecclesiastical articles. They removed the cassock from the innocent Doulas and turned him over to the prince for trial. The prince ordered him to be scourged and wanted to cut off his hands according to the law for such a crime but, at that moment, that brother repented and declared the innocence of Doulas. After twenty years of exile and humiliation, Doulas was restored to the monastery and, on the third day, reposed in the Lord. His body vanished in a miraculous way.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR LAZAR [LAZARUS], SERBIAN PRINCE

Lazar was one of the Serbian noblemen who ruled the Serbian empire after the death of Tsar Dushan. After the death of Tsar Urosh, Patriarch Ephrem crowned Lazar as the Serbian king. Lazar sent a delegation to Constantinople with the monk Isaiah to implore the patriarch to lift [remove] the anathema from the Serbian people. He fought against the Turkish powers on several occasions. Finally, he clashed [fought] on the Field of Blackbirds [Kosovo Polje] on June 15, 1389 A.D. against the Turkish Emperor Amurat where he was beheaded. His body was translated and interred in Ravanica, his memorial church [Zaduzbina] near Cuprija and later was translated to Ravanica in Srem and from there, during the Second World War (1942) was translated to Belgrade and placed in the Cathedral Church of the Holy Archangel Michael where it rests today incorrupt and extends comfort and healing to all those who turn to him with prayer. [In 1989, on the occasion of the six-hundred year anniversary of his martyrdom, St. Lazar's relics were again translated to the monastery of Ravanica in Cuprija]. St. Lazar restored the monasteries of Hilendar [Mt. Athos] and Gornjak. He built Ravanica and Lazarica [in Krusevac] and was a benefactor of the Russian monastery St. Pantaleon [Mt. Athos] as well as many other churches and monasteries.

5. SAINT EPHREM, SERBIAN PATRIARCH

As the son of a priest, Ephrem from an early age yearned for a spiritual and ascetical life. He fled to Mt. Athos when his parents wanted him to marry. Later, he returned and lived a life of asceticism in the Ibar gorge and in the monastery of Dechani [Kosovo]. When rivalry and war broke out concerning precedence in the State and, unfortunately even in the Church, the Assembly [Sabor] chose Ephrem to succeed the deceased Sava as patriarch in 1375 A.D. When he was informed of his election, he wept bitterly but was unable to refuse. He crowned Prince Lazar as Tsar in 1382 A.D., renounced his throne and turned it over to Spiridon and again withdrew to the wilderness. Following the death of Spiridon in 1388 A.D., Tsar Lazar begged him to accept the throne again. He governed the Serbian Church in the difficult time of the defeat at Kosovo [1389 A.D.] until 1400 A.D. when he died in the eighty-eighth year of his earthly life and took up habitation with the Lord Whom he loved. His relics repose in the monastery of Pech [Kosovo].

6. BLESSED AUGUSTINE, THE BISHOP OF HIPPO

Augustine turned from paganism to Christianity, thanks to the counsels, tears and prayers of his mother Monica. He was a great teacher of the Church and an influential writer but with certain unapproved extremes in his teaching. As bishop of Hippo, he glorified the Lord for thirty-five years and lived a total of seventy-six years on earth (354-430 A.D.).

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT VITUS

Vitus most beautiful, full of heavenly honey,
Before unbelievers, confesses Christ,
And mocks the lifeless idols
And the idolatrous darkened soothsayers.
Glorifies Christ, as the power of God,
To his father and to the judge, justice teaches,
But against him, both of them took up arms,
And for the young Vitus, torments prepared.
But God, His sufferers protects
And glorifies His glorifiers.
Vitus, in the face of the emperor, needed
To witness to the Lord Christ,
And in Rome, to suffer publicly,
That his name would be more glorified.
Little Vitus, the angels held,
Little Vitus, the angels led,
And his soul, the angels bore
Into Paradise took it and to God presented it.

REFLECTION

It is not always easy to conquer the spirit of vanity and conceit in oneself. In this, only the great spiritual directors have succeeded, primarily with God's grace, with constant vigilance over their souls and with very delicate spiritual sensitivities and distinctions. At one time, Abba Nisteroes was walking with one of his brethren. Suddenly, they spotted a serpent on the road. The brother quickly moved aside and the great Nisteroes fled after him. "Are you also afraid, father?" the monk asked Nisteroes. The elder replied: "No, my son, I am not afraid but I had to flee otherwise I would not have fled from the spirit of vanity." That is: "Had I remained in place, you would have been amazed at me and I would have become vain from that!"

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of many who were sick: **"And besought Him that they might only touch the hem of the His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole" (St. Matthew 14:36):**

1. How many who were sick only touched the hem of the Lord's garment and were made whole;
2. How my soul can be healed if I touch the hem of His Body and Blood, as the physical garment of His Divinity.

HOMILY

-About the poor man and his Creator-

"He who mocks the poor, blasphemes his Maker (Creator)" (Proverbs 17:5).

If you are wealthy, in what are you wealthy, if not in the property of God? The things which constitute your wealth, whose are they, if not God's? Therefore, if you become proud in that which you possess, you become proud with the property of another, you become proud with that which is loaned to you by God. Why do you then mock the poor man who has less of someone else's property in his hands? Why do you mock him if he borrowed less from God than you? If he took less, he owes less; and you who took more, owe more. Not only should you not mock the poor man, you should admire him. Behold, he leads a struggle on the battlefield of this world with much less means than you. Both of you are soldiers, only you fight as a soldier abundantly equipped with all the needs and he fights naked and hungry. If the both of you succumb and surrender to your enemy, he will be judged more leniently than you. However, if you are both victorious, he will receive a greater reward than you and his victory will be more celebrated than yours.

He, who mocks the naked and hungry soldier, mocks his king. He, who mocks the poor, shames his Creator. If you know that the poor man's Creator is your Creator, the one and the same, you would not mock him. If you know that the poor man stands in the same military rank in which you are also, you will cover him, feed him and you will bring him closer to yourself.

O, Omnipotent Lord, boundless is Your wisdom in the economy of Your creation. Illumine us by Your Holy Spirit that we may marvel at that economy and, with reverence and love, gaze upon all of Your creation, gazing upon them through You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT TIKHON, BISHOP OF AMATHUS

Saint Tikhon was a miracle-worker. Following the death of Blessed Mnemonius, Tikhon was unanimously elected a bishop and consecrated by the renowned Epiphanius for the Diocese of Amathus. His purity of life and zeal for Orthodoxy recommended him for this office. There were still pagans on Cyprus at that time. With apostolic zeal St. Tikhon undertook to convert the unbelievers into believers. In that, he had great success. After lengthy labor in the vineyard of the Lord, Tikhon took up habitation in blessed eternity about the year 425 A.D. He was called a miracle-worker because of the many miracles he worked during his life. Tikhon's father was a baker. When his father left him alone in the store, he would distribute bread free of charge to the poor. Once, his father reproached him for this. Tikhon prayed to God and their granary was so filled with wheat that the door could not be opened without difficulty. Again, at another time, he planted withered branches of a vine and the vine became green and, in due time, brought forth fruit.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS TIGRIUS AND EUTROPIUS

Tigrius and Eutropius were among the clergy of St. John Chrysostom. When evil men banished Chrysostom from Constantinople, the cathedral church [Hagia Sophia] was set on fire and a flame rose from it and fell upon the houses of the persecutors of this beacon of the Church. The people saw the finger of God in that but the enemies of Chrysostom attributed this fire to his adherents. Many of those who were accused suffered bitterly because of that, among them Tigrius, the presbyter and Eutropius, the reader. Optatius, the mayor of the city, an unbaptized Greek with particular malice, began a pursuit for Chrysostom's followers. Tigrius, in his youth, was a slave of a wealthy man who castrated him. Freeing himself of slavery, he dedicated himself completely to the service of the Church and in this service shone as a shining ray. Optatius subjected this "meek, humble, charitable and hospitable" man to great tortures and then banished him into exile to Mesopotamia where he died in prison. Eutropius, chaste from birth, pure, blameless and kind was beaten by oxen whips and by canes and finally hanged. When Christians took his body to bury it, sweet angelic singing was heard in the air.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TIGRIUS, AND SAINT EUTROPIUS

**Chrysostom, as an all-glorious eagle soars,
Beside him Tigrius and Eutropius the reader
As small eaglets, but strong and faithful,
Followed him, kind and innocent;
And helpless malice, viciousness uses,
The weak and the evil, the devil unites quickly.
The malicious rose up against the servants of God.
And on them, poured out a sea of mockery.
As arsonists, the men of God,
The wonderful martyrs, under torture were placed;
But, every suffering is for heroes
And even suffering despises those who are weak in virtue!
Tigrius, the Presbyter and Eutropius, the Reader
By torture, the truth of God, they confirm.
As arsonists, the heroes of God
Slain they were, innocent lambs!
Eaglets, after the eagle, they flew
And in Paradise sweet, to rest they fell.
And malice from the mud, yelp after the eagles
In mud, was it born, and in the mud it remains.**

REFLECTION

In enumerating the miracles of the Christian Faith we need never forget the countless and great miracles of the changes of heart and dispositions of people truly converted to the Faith. How many are the enraged criminals that this Faith tamed! How many bloodthirsty robbers has the Faith transformed to innocent lambs! How many debauched ones has the Faith turned into chaste ones! How many persecutors has the Faith turned into defenders of the Faith! How many selfish avaricious men has the Faith taught compassion! How many fearful ones has the Faith directed on the road to extreme self-sacrifice! Metropolitan Philaret writes about Russian Prince Vladimir: "A lover of all pleasures; how this was not possible any longer for the pagan Vladimir in Christianity and he became a model of a chaste married life; he dismissed all women and lovers and lived with one, the devout Anna. An evil, vindictive and bloodthirsty fratricide in paganism, Vladimir, in Christianity, was the most compassionate friend of the poor. The poor always had access to him and he distributed both money and food with a generous hand." More than that: "the sick are unable to come to my palace," said he and ordered that meat, fish, bread, yeast and honey be carted about the streets. The Gospel words: "**Blessed are the merciful**" (St. Matthew 5:7), penetrated into the depth of his heart and became his rule of life.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the daughter of the woman of Canaan: **"And behold a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts and cried out unto Him saying: Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil" (St. Matthew 15:22):**

1. How the woman of Canaan perseveringly and repeatedly implored the Lord to save her daughter from the devil who tormented her;
2. How the Lord praised the faith of the woman and healed her daughter;
3. How the Lord can even free my soul from the devil who attacks my soul when it is in alienation from God only if we persistently pray to Him with faith.

HOMILY

-About how death and life depend on the tongue-

**"Death and life are in the power of the tongue"
(Proverbs 18:21).**

Did not our Lord Himself confirm this when He said that for every empty word men will give an answer before the Dread Judgment? Didn't He explicitly say: **"But I tell you, that of every idle word men speak, they shall give account on the Day of Judgment. For by your words, you shall be justified and by your words, you shall be condemned" (St. Matthew 12: 36-37).** Whoever is justified will receive life. Whoever is condemned will receive death. Therefore, do you see how life and death are in the power of the tongue? The Apostle James says: **"For in many things we all offend. If anyone does not offend in word, he is a perfect man, able also to lead round by a bridle the whole body" (St. James 3:2).**

Truly, great is the unexplored mystery of the word and the influence of the word cannot be measured nor estimated. Today the word of men can be carried by artificial instruments from one end of our planet to the other. A word spoken by the tongue in America can be heard by the ear in Europe. Is not this a picture of the All-hearing God? O my brethren, we cannot whisper anything here to the earth that the heavens are not going to hear. Our every word comes before the assembly of the angels of God. Hades receives our every evil word and retains it as a guarantee of our eternal death and Paradise receives every good word and retains it as a guarantee of our eternal life. Truly, does the Old Testament sage wisely speak and promptly reminds us with the words that: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

O Lord our Savior, eternal Word of God, help us to bridle our tongue so that it does not speak to our destruction. Help us to speak with the tongue only that which is according to Your holy will and that which is for our eternal salvation in the life eternal.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS MANUEL, SABEL AND ISHMAEL

Manuel, Sabel and Ishmael were brothers born in Persia of a pagan father and a Christian mother. They were educated in the spirit of Christianity and were baptized. As Christians they were high-ranking officials at the court of King Alamundar. They were sent to Emperor Julian the Apostate to conduct negotiations and to confirm peace between the Persian and Graeco-Roman empires. The apostate emperor arranged some sort of blasphemous celebration in honor of the idols in Chalcedon. At this celebration, the emperor, with his noblemen, offered sacrifices to the idols. The Persian emissaries absented themselves from this celebration. The emperor summoned them and ordered that they also take part in the celebration and to offer sacrifices to the gods. They declared that they were foreign citizens and that they came as emissaries of the Persian king for the sake of establishing peace between the two empires and not for anything else; that they are Christians and that they consider it unworthy to worship dead idols and to offer them sacrifices. The emperor became enraged and cast them into prison. The next day, he brought them out and again began to dispute with them about faith, but the holy brothers were adamant and unwavering. They were then bound naked to trees, beaten and scraped with an iron brush. During the entire time of torturing they prayed to God with thanksgiving for their tortures: "O sweet Jesus these torments are sweet for the sake of Your love!" An angel of God appeared to them, comforted them and removed every pain from them. Contrary to all international relations, the wicked Emperor Julian finally pronounced judgment that the three brothers be beheaded. When they were beheaded, there was a great earthquake; the earth split and received the bodies of the holy martyrs so that the pagans could not burn their bodies as ordered by the emperor. After that the earth gave up the bodies of these martyrs so that Christians could find them and honorably bury them. Many miracles occurred over their relics which, when many pagans saw, they converted to the Christian Faith. When the Persian king, upon hearing how Julian inhumanely gave his emissaries over to death, he prepared an army against him. Convinced of victory, Julian set out against the Persian Empire but he was overwhelmingly defeated and perished in shame to the joy and ridicule of the entire world.

2. THE VENERABLE PIOR

Pior was a hermit [Silentary] in Nitria. Inflamed with love for God, Pior, at an early age, renounced the world and withdrew to the Egyptian wilderness where he heroically lived a life of asceticism. It is said that he never sat at the table to eat but that he always ate standing and working. When he was asked why he does this, St. Pior replied: "I do not want to be occupied with eating as an occupation but rather as something marginal." When they called him in council to judge a brother who had committed a sin, Pior arrived carrying a sack of sand on his back and on his chest a small bag of sand. Asked what does that mean, the saint replied: "The sack of sand on my back are my sins which I do not see and the bag of sand on my chest are the sins of my brother which I have to judge." All the brethren were then ashamed and cried out: "This is the path of salvation!" Pior lived to be a hundred years old and reposed in the Lord in the fourth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS MANUEL, SABEL AND ISHMAEL

Of a Christian mother and a pagan father
Three blood brothers, wonderful peacemakers:
Manuel, Sabel and young Ishmael
Dead for Christ's sake, to earthly delight
To serve peace, voluntarily set out,
To unite in peace, the Persian and Greeks.
But Julian the cursed, servant of the devil,
Began to dispute with the three brothers about the Faith,
And offered the brothers, in Christ baptized,
To embrace his faith impure.
To the crowned beast, the brothers then replied:
To change our faith, for that reason we did not come,
But, peace to make, O emperor of the Greeks,
In the Son of God, we have faith.
The worse for the better can still be given
But better for worse, only the insane one can exchange.
The enraged emperor, in him, Hades burns,
In bitter torments, the three brothers slew.
But God the All-seeing, Who, the value of all knows
Against the evil emperor turned with anger;
Julian, the evil one, weak before God,
A shameful death died, everyone laughed,
Everyone laughed, who knew his pride
And through him, the weakness of injustice acknowledged.

REFLECTION

The adversaries of Christ, through their efforts against Christ, always achieved the opposite results. Instead of stopping the river of Christianity, they have widened it, deepened it and made it louder. Instead of drying Christianity up they have, so to speak, caused a flood throughout the entire world. Where one martyr fell, a company of Christians was created; where shame was committed, glory sprouted; where it was said the end of Christianity, there was the beginning of luxuriant crops. In spite of all international considerations and customs, Julian the Apostate, because of his insane idolatrous fanaticism, killed the Persian emissaries for peace; Manuel, Sabel and Ishmael. What did Julian accomplish by this? He multiplied the number of Christians, increased the number of martyrs and hastened his own end and the end of paganism. Directly and unwillingly, the apostate helped in the spreading and deepening of Christianity, not only by his evil persecution but also by his inadvertent statements. Thus in discussions with Christians, Julian stated: "Christ did nothing in His life that would merit glory, except if that is counted as a great deed, that He healed the lame, the blind and expelled demons!" O wretched Julian! As if the opening of the eyes of only one blind man by the powerful word alone was not a greater deed, than the subjugation of ten kingdoms! How valuable is it, that Julian, as the greatest traitor of Christ after Judas, recognized the miracles of Christ.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus: **"And after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother and brought them: up into a high mountain apart. And was transfigured before them" (St. Matthew 17:1-2):**

1. How the face of the transfigured Lord shone as the sun;
2. How, even I, darkened by sin, can shine by Christ's power and grace with the original radiance of sinless man.

HOMILY

-About the punishment of those who bear false witness-

"The false witness will not go unpunished and he who utters lies will perish" (Proverbs 19:9).

God and all the hosts of heaven see everything that happens in the world. Therefore, how can man conceal the truth from so many witnesses of the truth? And, not only do the heavenly hosts see the truth, but they also are zealous for the truth. Therefore, how can a mortal man go against the truth, which means, to go against the myriads of heavenly zealots for the truth? In truth, darkened in the mind is the one who thinks that he can conceal the truth and proclaim a lie instead of truth. When millions of discerning angels know the truth, can a man conceal the truth? Can someone rise up against the truth and not be punished? O my brethren, there is nothing more false than falsehood! Nothing more unsuccessful! Nothing more arrogant! Nothing more insane!

God and all the Hosts of heaven see that which occurs inside man. Especially the Guardian Angel of man sees that. And this Guardian Angel does not tolerate that man brings out from himself and about himself that which is not in him. If a man remains persistent in his lie, his Angel will abandon him and will turn him over completely to the spirits of lies. Then, woe to that man! Of what benefit is it to witness falsely against the entire world if his Angel would witness truthfully against him before God and the hosts of heaven! It would be better for that man if he had not been born. For, whoever lies, lies to the Spirit of God and the Spirit of God abandons the liar in darkness and death.

O Lord of Truth, sustain us by the power of Your Holy Spirit that we never witness falsely. Sweeten to us Your Holy Truth and turn away a false word from our tongue.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR LEONTIUS

Leontius was a Roman commander in Tripoli in Phoenicia during the reign of Emperor Vespasian. He was born in Hellas [Greece] "of great physical stature, powerful, strong and brave in battles." Hadrian, the imperial deputy, sent a military detachment to arrest Leontius, for Hadrian was a fierce adversary and persecutor of Christians. Hypatius, the senior officer of this detachment, became ill enroute with a bitter fever because of which the detachment had to slow down their march. One night an angel of God appeared to Hypatius and said to him: "If you want to be well, cry out three times toward heaven with all your soldiers: 'O God of Leontius help me!' "

Hypatius informed his companions of his vision and all in unison cried out as the angel instructed and immediately Hypatius became well. This miracle astonished all but especially Theodulus. Hypatius and Theodulus then went ahead of the other soldiers to seek Commander Leontius. Leontius received them graciously and served them. When he expounded his faith in Christ to them, their hearts burned with love for Christ and, at that moment, a bright cloud descended upon Hypatius and Theodulus and dew from a cloud descended upon them. That was the Holy Spirit of God Himself baptizing these converted souls and St. Leontius, at that moment, spoke these words: "In the name of the All-holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The evil Hadrian, learning that Hypatius and Theodulus became Christians, ordered that they be scourged without mercy and following that to be beheaded with an axe. And so, these two spiritual children of Leontius died.

Then Hadrian prescribed cruel tortures for Leontius but Leontius remained unwavering in his holy faith. His entire body was covered with wounds but he diligently prayed to God not to abandon him. In the midst of the cruelest torments, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, encouraged and comforted him. Finally, they knocked the martyr Leontius to the ground and beat him until he gave up his soul to God. The sufferings of St. Leontius was personally witnessed by Kir Notarius who recorded all that he saw on lead tablets and placed them in the martyr's grave. St. Leontius suffered honorably in the year 73 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE LEONTIUS, THE DISCERNER

Leontius was of Greek descent from the Peloponnese. He lived a life of asceticism sixty years in the monastery Dionysiou [Mt. Athos] and entered into rest in the year 1605 A.D. being eighty-five years of age.

It is said that this saint entered the monastery only once and only once did he leave the monastery in sixty full years. That is: he entered when he first went to Dionysiou and departed when they carried him out to bury him. He possessed the miraculous gift of discernment and prophecy and following his death myrrh flowed from his relics.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT LEONTIUS

Leontius, the heart of a lion,
A lion's heart and name,
Of his God, he was not ashamed
But, before all, confessed Christ,
The Savior of the world, Christ the God.
Youth, strength and commandership scorned
For the sake of the truth of the Crucified Christ
And [Who] from death, resurrected gloriously.
Flattered, hosted, glorified and favored with gifts,
He, his God did not deny,
Flogged, spat upon, scraped and crucified,
He, his God, did not deny,
But, the greater the torment and ridicule
The flame of faith greater and brighter.
The Roman Empire and all the powers of Hades
Against him had turned,
But he knew that alone, he was not.
For, beside him, stood Christ.
A pillar of stone, amidst the angry reeds,
A pillar of fire among the slaves of darkness.
By his faith, he amazed the people,
To live eternally, his life he gave.

REFLECTION

A scientist examines natural phenomenon with great attention and we, with greater attention, should examine the phenomenons and the actions of the grace of God. Behold, what one of the great spiritual fathers' witnesses about the act of Holy Communion. Father John of Kronstadt writes: "I am amazed at the greatness and the life-giving power of divine Communion. An elderly woman, who was spitting blood and was so completely exhausted from not being able to eat anything, began to recover the day that she received Communion from me. A young girl close to death began to recover, eat, drink and speak after Communion whereas, before that, she was unconscious, in convulsions and did not eat or drink anything." O, if every priest, with the attention of a scientist and with the love of a prayerful man, did observe and follow the actions of the Grace of Holy Communion similar to Father John!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the young man whom the devil tormented, at times throwing him into the fire and, at times, into the water: **"Lord, have pity on my son: for he is a lunatic and suffers severely; for often times he falls into the fire and often times into the water"** (St. Matthew 17:14):

1. How the Lord rebuked the devil and the young man was made whole;
2. How even the evil spirit casts me at times into the fire of passions and at times into the water of carnality;
3. How even the Lord can save me from falling into the fire and into the water if only I pray to Him.

HOMILY

-About God's indebtedness-

**"He who has compassion on the poor lends to God
and He will repay Him for his good deed"
(Proverbs 19:17).**

The poor man who begs and the rich man who gives both are indebteding the Lord, but only under the condition that the poor man begs in the name of the Lord with humility and that the rich man gives in the name of the Lord with compassion. Everyone who receives should know that he receives that which belongs to God and everyone who gives should know that he gives that which belongs to God. Such giving has a price and such receiving has a price. All of us enter this world naked and naked shall we leave this world. All of us are beggars before the Lord for we possess nothing that we have not received from the Lord. Therefore, give to the poor man as God as given to you. You take what is another's and you give to your own when you perform charity. The poor man is closer to you than all of your goods even as God, the Creator of men, every man is incomparably more precious than all of his goods. If you have been given riches, it was given to you for temptation: that your heart be tempted! That God and all the heavenly hosts see whether you understood from whom are all your riches and why they were given to you. Blessed are you if you know that your goods are from God and belong to God! Blessed are you if you consider the poor as your companions, among your family members and share with them from that which God has entrusted to you!

O how immeasurable is God's love for mankind! Behold, all that you have belongs to God but, nevertheless, God considers Himself your debtor if you take from Him and give to the poor and He will repay you for your good. What kind of mercy can be compared to this!

O Man-loving Lord, open our minds to understand the mystery of Your mercy and soften our hearts as wax, that as wax they burn and shine with the reflection of Your inexpressible mercy!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE JUDE

Saint Jude was one of the Twelve Apostles. He was the son of Joseph and Salome and the brother of James, the brother of the Lord. With Salome, the daughter of Angeja the son of Varahina, the brother of Zacharias, Joseph the carpenter had four sons: James, Hosea, Simon and Jude. This Jude is sometimes called: "Jude, the brother of James" because of his more famous brother (St. Luke 6:16 Acts 1:14). St. Jude begins his epistle in this manner: "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and the brother of James" (St. Jude 1:1). Even though he could be called the brother of the Lord as much as James, he did not do this out of humility and shame for, in the beginning, he did not believe Christ the Lord. When the elder Joseph, before his death, wanted to leave a portion of his estate to Jesus as well as to his other children, all of them protested this, even Jude, only James voluntarily set aside a share of his portion and intended it for Jesus. Jude is also called Levi and Thaddeaus. There is another Thaddeaus of the Seventy Apostles (August 21) but this Thaddeaus or Jude was one of the Great Apostles. Jude preached the Gospel throughout Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Idumedia, Syria, Arabia, Mesopotamia and Armenia. In Edessa, the town of Abgar, he augmented the preaching of the other Thaddeaus. When Jude preached throughout the regions around Ararat he was captured by pagans, crucified on a cross and killed by being shot throughout with arrows to eternally reign in the Kingdom of Christ.

2. VENERABLE PAISIUS THE GREAT

Paisius was an Egyptian by birth and nationality. After a vision in a dream, his mother dedicated him to the service of God. As a young man, Paisius came to the Venerable Pambo who received him as his disciple and he was a co-disciple of Venerable John Kolovos [The Short] who wrote the biography of Paisius. To the joy of his spiritual father, Paisius exerted labor after labor and mortification after mortification. Many times the Prophet Jeremiah, whom he especially loved and often read, appeared to him; even the angels of God often appeared to him; even the Lord Christ Himself appeared to him. "Peace be with you my beloved chosen one!" the Lord Christ said to him. By the great grace of God, Paisius possessed the special gift of abstaining from food. Often he did not taste bread for fifteen days, more often for a week and once, in the witness of St. John the Short, he went for seventy days without partaking of anything. He waged a great struggle with the spirits of evil, who appeared to him at times exactly as they are and, at times in the form of radiant angels. But the blessed servant of God did not permit himself to be deceived and fascinated. Paisius was famous throughout Egypt as a discernor and miracle-worker. He took up habitation in eternity in the year 400 A.D. The Venerable Isidore of Pelusium translated the relics of Paisius to his monastery and honorably buried them.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR ZOSIMUS

Zosimus was a Roman soldier during the reign of Emperor Trajan. He courageously confessed his faith in Christ the Lord for which he endured cruel tortures. In the midst of his tortures, he heard a voice from heaven saying: "Be brave Zosimus and sign yourself with the cross, I am with you!" Angels of God appeared to him in prison. After many tortures, Zosimus was beheaded in the year 116 A.D.

4. VENERABLE JOHN THE HERMIT [ANCHORITE]

John lived a life of asceticism in the sixth century in the proximity of Jerusalem. Through his mortification, he achieved a high degree of purity and power so that even the wild beasts were submissive to him. John reposed in the Lord in extreme old age in the year 586 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE PAISIUS THE GREAT

Paisius the great, from the earliest age
Behind him, the doors of all desires, he closed.
The spirit to God lifted, to that, the only desire,
As all the great saints of old.
Wonderful Paisius, the monks asked:
Which virtue to God is more pleasing?
That which is hidden! to them, Paisius replied,
And that which is expressed, to God is not pleasing.
When Paisius, by his life, glorified God
To him, the Glorified Lord Christ appeared:
Peace be to you, chosen one, what do you wish, tell me,
According to your wish, it will be, ask and receive!
When from the Lord, these words he heard
Paisius gave himself over to weeping as a child.
O gentle Lord, a man of great sin am I,
And that which is made known, to God is not pleasing.
And because of my many sins; very inconsolable am I,
According to Your mercy, forgive me my sins
All that I have sinned O God from early youth,
And for future times, grant me strength
That from new sins, the yoke, I do not burden.
That to the end of my life, Your will I do
With greater love for You to burn.
The Lord, this prudent desire fulfilled for him
And to His saint, granted a blessing.

REFLECTION

The monks once inquired of Paisius the Great: "Father, speak to us a word of salvation and how, according to God, we should live?" The elder replied to them: "Go and keep the commandments of God and preserve the traditions of the Fathers." The tradition of the Fathers is the experience of the saints in the spiritual field, the enormous experience of nearly two-thousand years, the experience of many hundreds and thousands of holy men and women. What a very rich depository of wisdom! What kind of an immense mass of proofs of every truth of Holy Scripture! All of that wealth, all of that wisdom, all of those proofs, all of this experience the Protestants have rejected! O madness inexpressible! O, the poverty of beggars!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the two blind men:"

"And behold, two blind men sitting by the wayside, heard that Jesus was passing by, and cried out, saying: 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!' " (St. Matthew 20:30):

1. How the two blind men cried out to the Lord: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!";
2. How the merciful Lord touched their eyes and they saw;
3. How I also am blinded by sin; and how even I can see if I cry out to the Lord to touch me.

HOMILY

-About revenge and the Avenger-

"Say not, I will repay evil! Trust in the Lord and He will help you" (Proverbs 20:22).

Do not be vengeful; do not return evil for evil. The evil from your neighbor is sufficient. If you return evil for evil to him, you will double the evil in the world. If you do not return evil for evil to him, he can still burn out his evil through repentance. Thus, you will reduce evil in the world through patience and forgiveness.

Do not be vengeful; do not return evil for evil. "But wait on the Lord," He sees and remembers and, in your time, even you and your evil doer will know that God sees and remembers. You ask yourself: What have I done in that I have not returned evil for evil? You have done the wisest deed that you could do in the given situation, i.e.; you have relinquished your struggle to the One Stronger than yourself and the Stronger will victoriously fight for you. If you enter into battle with the evil doer you might be defeated. But God cannot be defeated. Therefore, relinquish your struggle to the Victorious and Undefeated One and patiently wait.

Learn from a small child. If someone attacks a child in the presence of his parents, the child does not return the attack by attacking but rather looks at his parents and cries. The child knows that his parents will protect him. How is it that you do not know what a little child knows? Your heavenly Parent is constantly beside you. That is why, do not be vengeful; do not return evil for evil rather look at your Parent and cry. Only in this way will you guarantee victory for yourself in conflict with evil men.

O Almighty Lord Who said: **"Vengeance is Mine" (Romans 12:19 Hebrews 10:30)**, protect us from the unrighteous ones by Your almighty hand and restrain us from vengeance. Counsel us by Your Holy Spirit that the greater heroism is to endure rather than to avenge.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR METHODIUS, BISHOP OF PATARA

From his youth, Methodius dedicated himself to asceticism and, as a city on a hill, was seen and summoned to the episcopacy in the city of Patara in Lycia. As a learned and eloquent hierarch, Methodius wrote against the heresy of Origen. His "God-inspired words shown throughout the entire world as lightning." The pagans rose up against him, tortured him and beheaded him in Chalcis in Syria in the year 311 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ARISTOCLES, DIMITRIANUS AND ATHANASIUS

Aristocles was a priest of the cathedral church in the town of Tamasus on Cyprus and lived a God-pleasing life. Because of his great zeal for the Faith, Aristocles was made worthy of a voice from heaven instructing him to go to Salamis in Cyprus and to receive the wreath of martyrdom. Dimitrianus the deacon and Athanasius the reader accompanied him. Arriving at Salamis, these men of God began to preach Christ. The pagans seized them and after torturing them, Aristocles was beheaded and Dimitrianus and Athanasius were burned alive in the year 306 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE NAHUM OF OHRID

Nahum's principle feast is celebrated on December 23 and June 20 is his summer feast (Life of St. Nahum December 23). During the summer feast there is a great assembly of people at the monastery of St. Nahum. Many sick people come or are brought to beseech healing through faith and prayer over the relics of the saint. Not only Orthodox people but also those from other faiths come to seek favor from St. Nahum. In 1926, a Muslim from Resna brought and donated a bell to the monastery out of thanksgiving because St. Nahum healed his brother from his deathbed and restored him to life. The donor was Jemail Zizo and his brother, who was healed, was called Suleiman Zizo. Both were prominent citizens of Resna.

4. SAINT KALLISTOS I, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

As a disciple of Gregory Sinaite, Kallistos lived a life of asceticism for twenty-eight years on Mt. Athos in the Scete of Magoula at the monastery Philotheou. He later founded the monastery of St. Mamas. He was elected patriarch of Constantinople in the year 1350 A.D. After four years he withdrew from the patriarchal throne and again returned to Mt. Athos. During the reign of John Paleologus, he was again returned to the throne where, as patriarch, he remained until his death. He died in the year 1368 A.D. enroute to Serres where he traveled to meet the Servian Empress Helena who came to seek help against the Turks. In the company of Ignatius, he compiled a beautiful guide [manual] for ascetics. In addition to this, he wrote the hagiography of St. Gregory Sinaite and St. Theodosius of Trnovo as well as numerous homilies. It is interesting to note how St. Maximus of Kapsokalyvia prophesied the death of Patriarch Kallistos. On his way to Serbia, Kallistos traveled through the Holy Mountain. Seeing him, St. Maximus said: "This elder will never see his flock again for behind him is heard the funeral chant: **"Blessed are the undefiled in the way' "** (Psalm 119:1).

5. SAINT LEUCIUS, BISHOP OF THE CITY OF BRINDISI [ITALY]

Leucius was born in Alexandria and, at the early age, entered a monastery. He was made worthy of great revelations and powerful grace so that he resurrected the dead and drove out demons from men. At first, he was a bishop of Alexandria and, by command from heaven, Leucius crossed over to Italy to the pagan town of Brindisi, which he completely baptized and built a church to the Mother of God. After many and successful labors he took up habitation in eternity during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II, in the fifth century.

6. BLESSED STUDIOS

Studios was a prominent patrician and consul in Constantinople. He founded the church of St. John the Forerunner near the Golden Gates and a monastery named Studion after him. This monastery became famous for the many glorious men, spiritual fathers, ascetics and many who suffered for the Faith [martyrs], the most famous of which was St. Theodore the Studite. The Latin Crusaders destroyed this monastery in 1204 A.D. but Emperor Constantine Paleologue Porphyrogenitus rebuilt it in the year 1293 A.D. A Turkish mosque stands on that place today.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT LEUCIUS

Leucius, Leucius, heart whitened.
In the Book of Life, of blessed name,
Memory of you in the heavens will eternally be
And on earth the Church will glorify you!
Such a voice, Leucius from the heavens heard
And a sweet-smelling peace, his voiced calmed.
Against Leucius the holy, the black devil arose
But Leucius against him [Devil], with the cross rose up,
Of demonic arrows, he was not wounded
But by the power of God, all the power of the devil he destroyed.
To the good shepherd, God gave him the power,
By that, preserved the flock in sinful Egypt.
And yet, he founded the Church in Brindisi
And instructed the people to protect the will of God
Many people he baptized and noblemen glorious,
And, with the torch of the Orthodox Faith, and enlightened all,
By his miracles, astonished the whole world,
And then to the Lord departed, the wreath of glory to receive.

REFLECTION

Saint Cyprian writes about immortality: "Whenever a famous man promises you something, you would believe his promise and would not even dare to think that he who was always faithful to his word would deceive you. But behold, O treacherous one, God Himself speaks to you and you are wavering with doubt. God promised you immortality after your departure from this world and you impudently doubt that promise? This means: you do not recognize God at all: it means that by your unbelieving you insult Christ the Lord and Teacher." O how powerful is the faith of the saints of God! How obvious and understandable and well explained it is with simple and powerful examples! The unholy do not doubt because they are supposedly more rational but because they are unholy. The holier man is always more rational for in the clear mirror of his heart, he sees the truth.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous withering of the unfruitful fig tree: **"And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he came up to it and found nothing on it but leaves; and He said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you henceforth forever!' And immediately the fig tree withered up" (St. Matthew 21:19):**

1. How the Lord cursed the fig tree with many leaves but without fruit and the fig tree withered up;
2. How even my life with many leaves - bodily cares, desires and thoughts - and without spiritual fruit, can come under the same curse if I do not amend my ways.

HOMILY

-About how our salvation is in the hands of God-

"The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but salvation is in the Lord" (Proverbs 21:31).

We are obligated to prepare ourselves but our success depends on God. All of our preparation is only a proposal to God but the proposal does not decide, but God decides. That is why people wisely say according to their experience: man proposes and God disposes. O Soldier of Christ, prepare your mind as a good horse, arm your heart with virtues, temper your will with mortifications, but know - that "salvation is in the Lord." O Merchant of Christ, practice good trade every day, exchanging the material for the spiritual, the earthly for the heavenly and mortality for immortality, but know - that "salvation is in the Lord." O Plowman of Christ, plow and re-plow your soul, sow the good evangelical seed on it every day, weed out the field of your soul from weeds, watch over it, but know that "salvation is in the Lord." A horse did not help the pharaoh in the Red Sea. Neither did the riches of Babylon help in the day of reckoning with God. A person can prepare all but, nevertheless, in that decisive moment can lose everything. For salvation is not in preparation, but in the Lord. That is why the saints, even though most prepared for the Kingdom of God and, in their hour of death, sighed not knowing whether they will be received into the Kingdom. O how well they remember the words of the Lord: **"When you have done everything that was commanded you, say: 'We are unprofitable servants!' "** (St. Luke 17:10). Brethren, let us be prepared for the day of temptation, well girded and armed but let us not hope in our own preparation, but in the Lord.

O Lord our Savior, help us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR JULIAN OF TARSUS

Julian was of noble and senatorial origin. He lived in Tarsus in Cilicia and suffered during the reign of Diocletian. Even though he was only eighteen years of age when he was subjected to torture for the Faith, St. Julian was sufficiently educated and strengthened in Christian piety. The imperial deputy led him from town to town for an entire year torturing him and all the time trying to persuade him to deny Christ. Julian's mother followed her son from a distance. When the deputy seized Julian's mother and sent her to counsel her son to deny Christ, for three days in prison she spoke the opposite advice, teaching him and encouraging him not to despair in spirit but with thanksgiving and courage go to his death. The torturers then sewed Julian in a sack with sand, scorpions and serpents and tossed the sack into the sea and Julian's mother also died under torture. His relics were tossed by the waves to the shore and the faithful translated them to Alexandria and honorably buried them in the year 290 A.D. Later, St. Julian's relics were translated to Antioch. Later on, St. John Chrysostom, himself, delivered a eulogy [an oration of praise] for the holy martyr Julian. St. John Chrysostom said: "From the mouth of the martyr proceeded a holy voice and, together with the voice, a light emanated brighter than the rays of the sun." Further, he added: "Take anyone, be it a madman or one possessed, and bring him to the grave of this saint where the relics of the martyr repose and you will see how he [the demon] without fail will leap out and flee as from a burning fire." It is obvious from these words how numerous miracles must have taken place at the grave of St. Julian.

2. THE VENERABLES JULIUS AND JULIAN

Julius and Julian were brothers from the Greek province of Mirmidonia. From childhood they were reared in Christianity with the vow that they will always live in chastity and serve the Church. Julius was a presbyter and Julian a deacon. They received a decree [grammata] from Emperor Theodosius the Younger to destroy pagan temples and to build Christian churches throughout the empire. These two brothers, as two apostles, converted non-Christians to Christianity throughout the east and west [of the empire] and built churches. They built over one hundred churches during their lifetime. They reposed peacefully in the Lord near Milan. The inhabitants of Milan invoke the help of St. Julius against wolves.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR ARCHIL [ARCHILIOS] II, KING OF GEORGIA

Archil was the son of King Stephen and the grandson of the great Georgian King Wakahtang Gorgaslan. King Archil, a great Christian and a defender of Christianity, was tortured by the Muslims and beheaded for Christ on March 20, 744 A.D. He was eighty years old when he suffered for the Lord and took up habitation in blessed eternity.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR LUARSAB II, PRINCE OF KARTLI IN GEORGIA

Luarsab's father, George X, suffered for the Faith and was poisoned by a Persian Shah. Luarsab, however, was cast into prison near Shiraz where he languished for seven years. Then, by order of Shah Abbas I, he was hanged in prison with two of his servants on July 21, 1622 A.D. A heavenly light was seen over his grave.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JULIUS AND SAINT JULIAN

When Julius and his brother Julian
To the Most-high God built
The ninety-ninth church,
Julian, then a tomb constructed
For his brother, holy Julius
And, when to the brother, the grave he showed,
Julius to him, meekly spoke:
Prepare yourself, my brother in the flesh,
This grave for you, was built,
Prepare yourself before God to go,
Before your brother the sinful Julius.
And God, to Julius designated
A hundredth church, yet to build
On a certain isolated island.
As the most glorious Julius said,
As he said, so it happened,
Before the older, the younger brother rested in peace,
And the older brother, the hundredth church added,
And when the hundredth, on the island, he built,
Then he, also, in eternity took up habitation.

REFLECTION

When a man begins to train himself in keeping silent, silence to him seems to be lesser than speech; but when he is trained in silence then he knows that speech is lesser than silence. A monk said to St. Sisoës: "I would like to preserve my heart but I cannot," to which the elder responded: "How can we preserve the heart when the gate to our heart the tongue stands open?" Charillos, the nephew of Lycurgus, was once asked why his uncle issued so few laws. He replied: "For those who speak little, many laws are not needed."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the blind Bartimeus: **"And they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a very great crowd, Bartimeus, a blind man the son of Timeus, was sitting by the wayside begging" (St. Mark 10:46):**

1. How Bartimeus cried out to the Lord with faith for healing and the Lord healed him;
2. How, even I, blinded in the soul sit by the road which the Lord passes by and, if I cry out to Him, He will heal me.

HOMILY

-About sowing and reaping-

**"He who sows iniquity reaps calamity [suffering]"
(Proverbs 22:8).**

If you commit an iniquity, perhaps suffering [calamity] may pass you by the very day when you commit the iniquity but suffering [calamity] has heard the voice of iniquity and unavoidably will come in its day.

Some sowing is sweet and some sowing is bitter. Some sowing resembles life but the fruit and reaping of that sowing is death.

Pay attention and learn from Holy Scripture: Eve sowed iniquity through disobedience and pain in childbirth befell her.

Cain sowed iniquity through fratricide and pain and sleepless wandering throughout the earth befell him.

Sodom and Gomorrah sowed iniquity and reaped the pain of a horrible death.

The sons of Eli the High Priest sowed iniquity for they committed a desecration along side the Ark of the Covenant and they reaped suffering for they bitterly lost their lives in battle.

Call to mind Saul, his iniquity and his sufferings. Then again, call to mind Ahab and Jezebel. And again, call to mind Herod and Judas. Then again, call to mind today and yesterday and the days before yesterday and every other day gone by and listen to the words of every day: "He who sows iniquity reaps calamity [suffering]!" Is there a village in the world in which this teaching is not put before its eyes? Is there a roof which, beneath it, does not conceal such a teaching? Is there any living man who has not witnessed this teaching in the living examples around him?

O All-wise Lord, if we did not know Your will we would be less responsible.

But since You gave us to know Your will, O All-merciful One, grant us the strength to fulfill it throughout all the days of our lives.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR EUSEBIUS, BISHOP OF SAMOSATA

Eusebius was a great expositor of Arianism. When the throne of Antioch became vacant, Meletius was elected patriarch at the insistence of Eusebius. Meletius was a great beacon of the Church who, after his death, was found worthy of great praise by St. John Chrysostom. However, the Arians quickly banished Meletius from Antioch. When Constantine's pernicious son Constantius died another much worse than he was crowned, Julian the Apostate. During the time of Julian's persecution of Christians, St. Eusebius removed his clerical attire and donned a soldier's uniform so that, under the guise of a soldier, he visited the persecuted Church throughout Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine strengthening the Orthodox Faith everywhere and installing the necessary priests and deacons and other clergy and, in some places, bishops. Following the stormy death of Julian, St. Eusebius counseled Meletius to convene a Council in Antioch in 361 A.D. at which twenty-seven hierarchs were present and the Arian heresy was condemned once more and the Faith of Orthodoxy was proclaimed in the same manner as it was expressed at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicea 325 A.D.]. Along with Meletius and Eusebius, St. Pelagius of Laodicea the famous ascetic and chaste one, made a great impact at the Council of Antioch. This Council was held during the reign of the pious Emperor Jovian. However, Emperor Jovian soon died and the wicked Valens was crowned and again the persecution of Orthodoxy ensued. St. Meletius was exiled to Armenia, Eusebius exiled to Thrace and Pelagius exiled to Arabia. After Valens, Gratian was crowned emperor and it was he who granted freedom to the Church and recalled the exiled hierarchs to their former sees. Thus, they returned: Meletius to Antioch, Eusebius to Samosata and Pelagius to Laodicea. At this time, many dioceses and many parishes were widowed and Eusebius zealously hurried to find and to give to the people canonical shepherds. When he came to the town of Doliche to enthrone the newly elected bishop Marinus and to denounce the heresy of Arius, which was strong in this town, a fanatical heretic hurled a ceramic tile at Eusebius' head and mortally wounded him. This great zealot, saint and martyr of Orthodoxy died to live eternally in the blessedness of Paradise. He suffered in the year 379 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ZENO AND ZENAS

Zeno was a Roman officer in the Arabian town of Philadelphia and Zenas was his servant. When the persecution of Christians began during the reign of Emperor Maximian, St. Zeno boldly appeared before Commander Maximus, confessed his faith in the One Living God and counseled Maximus that, he too, renounce lifeless idols and embrace the only True Faith. The commander became enraged and cast Zeno into prison. When the faithful Zenas visited his master in prison, he also was seized and arrested. Both of them were tortured for Christ and finally thrown into the fire that the pagans had doused with oil. Their souls were crowned with wreaths in the Kingdom of Christ and their bodily remains were interred in the Church of St. George at the place called Cyparisson.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EUSEBIUS SAINT MELETIUS SAINT PELAGIUS

The Church is never without shepherds,
Neither without suffering nor without heroes.
When the sharp sword flashes in a Goliath manner,
Resistance offered, the Shepherd of Samosata,
Eusebius and Meletius with him,
As two stars the third: Pelagius.
Zealots of Holy Orthodoxy,
Glorious saints of God's Church.
Suffering for Christians, there was at that time,
On both sides, bitter sufferings,
On one side, the wild heretics
On the other side, the insane emperors.
To preserve the soul, it was difficult
And the truth of God, to withstand,
Against lies and against violence,
Amidst the tares, very little sweet basil there was,
A little, a little immortelle and feather grass!
Three hierarchs three fragrant flowers:
Enough honey for all the poison of the world.
Eusebius as a zealot began
And his life as a martyr ended.
Eusebius, as a high priest,
God's chosen one, bless us!

REFLECTION

Why does the good Lord permit assaults and sufferings on the True Faith while He permits the pleasure of tranquility to heresies and paganism? Why? Even St. John Chrysostom asks and immediately replies: "So that you would recognize their weakness (the weakness of the heresies and paganism) when you see that they disintegrate on their own without any disturbance and also to be convinced in the power of faith which endures misfortunes and even multiplies through its adversaries." "Therefore, if we quarrel with the pagans or with the wretched Jews, it is sufficient to emphasize as evidence of divine power that the Faith (Christianity) which was subjected to countless struggles maintained victory" even when the entire world stood against her [the Church]. St. Isaac the Syrian says: "The wondrous love of God toward man is recognized when man is in misfortunes that are destroying his hope. Here, God manifests His power for his [man's] salvation. For man never recognizes the power of God in tranquility and freedom."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous dumbness of Zacharias the high-priest: **"And behold, you shall be dumb and unable to speak until the day when these things come to pass, because you have not believed my words which will be fulfilled in their proper time" (St. Luke 1:20):**

1. How Zacharias did not believe the angel of God that the old womb of his wife [Elizabeth] could conceive and give birth and how, because of that he was struck dumb according to the words of the angel;
2. How, even I am, as though struck dumb when I cannot sufficiently speak about God's miracles because my faith is small.

HOMILY

-About how the slothful man excuses himself-

"The slothful man says: A lion is outside; in the streets I might be slain!" (Proverbs 22:13).

In order to justify his slothfulness, the slothful man emphasizes the difficulties and obstacles of a certain task and magnifies them beyond measure. If a man annoys him, he will say that the entire village annoys him; if the leaves rustle, he will justify that he is unable to go to work because of a storm; if a rabbit is in front of his house, he will say it is a lion! He says this in order not to leave the house and to delay his work.

Slothfulness is completely contrary to the nature of man. The nature of man is activity; the nature of man seeks to be occupied, to work and to build. Slothfulness is the sure sign of a distortion of the nature of man. That slothfulness is a terrible vice is clear in that an active man is never envious of the slothful man, while the slothful man is envious of the active man; in the same manner a sober man is not envious of the drunk, while the drunk is envious of the sober man.

O Lord, ever-active Creator, save us from the dull and sinful slothfulness by which we distance ourselves from our primordial nature [created] from Your image and likeness, Master of all things! Inspire us, with Your Holy Spirit, all-compassionate and joy-creating.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE-MARTYR AGRIPPINA

Saint Agrippina was born and educated in Rome. From her childhood she trained herself to live an evangelical life, driving away the stench of passions from her heart and filling her heart with the sweet-smelling fragrance of purity, of virginity and chastity. She was betrothed to Christ the Lord and, as the Bride of Christ, suffered during the reign of Emperor Valerian. She endured flogging with rods until her bones were crushed. An angel of God appeared to her and strengthened her. While being tortured, St. Agrippina gave up her soul to God. Her companions, Bassa, Paula and Agathonice, translated her relics to the island of Sicily and honorably buried them there. A church was later built there in St. Agrippina's honor. Countless miracles were wrought from her relics. By the power of her relics, even the Hagarians were turned away from the town where her relics reposed. St. Agrippina rested in the year 275 A.D. and was crowned with glory.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS EUSTOCHIUS AND GAIUS AND OTHERS WITH THEM

Eustochius was a pagan priest during the reign of Emperor Maximian and by witnessing the heroism of the Christian martyrs rejected paganism and was baptized. Eudoxius, the bishop of Antioch, personally baptized him. After that Eustochius gradually converted his relatives to Christianity. His relative Gaius was baptized along with three children: Probus, Lollias and Urban. All of these, and others with them, were brought before the court, tortured and beheaded in Lystra for the sake of their faith in Christ the Lord. Their souls took up habitation in the eternal Kingdom of Christ.

3. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE ICON OF THE ALL-HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD [THEOTOKOS] OF THE TOWN OF VLADIMIR

When the Tartar King Ahmet besieged Moscow, Prince John Vasillievitch set out with an army to defend the city. Even though the army of Prince John was smaller in number and weaker than the Tartar army, nevertheless, it emerged victorious. All at once, an indescribable fear overcame the Tartars and they became confused and fled. Everyone ascribed this unexpected success to the icon of the All-Holy Birth-giver of God before whom the Russian people prayed for salvation from the Tartars. As a result of this, June 23 was designated in Russia for the commemoration of this miracle.

4. THE HISTORY OF THE REPENTANCE OF THEOPHILUS

Theophilus, out of envy toward the bishop, rendered his soul to the devil and, in writing, renounced Christ and the Birth-giver of God [Theotokos]. However, after that Theophilus repented bitterly and obtained the forgiveness of the Holy All-pure One. After forty days of fasting and tearful prayers, Theophilus received back the paper he had written renouncing Christ, which he had given to the devil, and openly confessed his sin in church before the bishop and the people. When the bishop pronounced the words of forgiveness and administered Holy Communion to him, the face of Theophilus shone as the sun. Behold, an example of how the merciful God not only forgives the sins of true penitents but also includes them among the saints.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT AGRIPPINA

Agrippina, purer than the lily,
Of God's Son, the betrothed,
Her soul, brighter than a flame
And her faith, firmer than a rock.
To the Lord she prayed, while being flogged,
Chanted psalms while enduring the wounds,
Forgiving everyone and blessing all,
As a pillar of blood, stood before judgment.
When her bones were crushed
An angel descended, the wounds healed!
But when new sufferings were imposed,
Agrippina's strength gave out,
To God, Agrippina gave her spirit,
The soul departed, the body remained.
The holy relics of St. Agrippina
Are the defense of the land of Sicily,
Medicine to the misfortunate and to the sick
And a protection from the battlesome hoards.
By the prayers of Saint Agrippina
May many miseries pass us by.

REFLECTION

Christian patience is a meek patience, but patience with a weak malice does not differ much from vengeance. Our saints are great in every good evangelical work but how great and magnificent are they in meek patience! Perhaps they appear the greatest to us in this goodness because we are the smallest in it. When the desert fathers at one time had gathered around John Kolovos [The Short] to hear an instruction a certain envious one heckled: "Your vessel, O John, is full of poison!" To that the meek John immediately responded: "You said that only seeing the exterior but what would you have said if you could see the interior?" When they brought out Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage for beheading, he commanded that twenty-five gold pieces be given to his executioner following his death.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of Zacharias from dumbness: **"And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed and he began to speak, blessing God" (St. Luke 1:64).**

1. How Zacharias became dumb because of his disbelief in the angel of God;
2. How Zacharias spoke as soon as he fulfilled the command of the angel: **"And asking for a writing tablet, he wrote the words: ' John is his name' " (St. Luke 1:63);**
3. How dumbness will fall from my soul as soon as I begin to fulfill the commandments of God and how my soul will be full of words and wisdom according to God.

HOMILY

-About how we need not envy the sinners-

"Be not emulous [envious] of evil men" (Proverbs 24:1).

Does anyone envy the leper? No one envies him. Why then do some envy the evil man when evil is a greater sickness than leprosy? Leprosy is a disease of the flesh but evil is a disease of the soul. A leper can be healthy within while he is unhealthy on the outside. However, the evil man can be healthy on the outside but his interior is ill, his heart is sick. Greater value has a tree that is sick on the outside but has a healthy core than a tree that is healthy on the outside but has a rotten core. Thus, leprosy is a lesser evil than evil i.e., than sin. Because under evil, the All-wise One thought of sin as evil.

Does the physician envy the sick person? He does not envy him. Neither does the righteous one envy the sinner. If you do not know whether you are righteous examine your heart: do you envy the sinner? If you envy the sinner then you are not righteous; if you do not envy the sinner, then rejoice, O righteous one of God. The sick person can envy the healthy one, but the healthy person does not envy the sick person. Neither does the righteous envy the sinner. A physician recognizes a fatal illness of his patient and, knowing that, he pities him but does not envy him. The righteous one recognizes the sickness of sin, horrifying and deadly, and does not envy the sinner but pities him.

O good and compassionate Lord, uproot envy from our hearts and implant love.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE FORERUNNER AND BAPTIZER OF THE LORD

Six months before his appearance in Nazareth to the All-holy Virgin Mary, the great archangel of God, Gabriel appeared to Zacharias the high priest in the Temple at Jerusalem. Before he announced the miraculous conception to the unwed virgin [Mary], the archangel announced the miraculous conception to the childless old woman [Elizabeth]. Zacharias did not immediately believe the words of the herald of God and this is why his tongue was tied with dumbness and remained as such until eight days after the birth of John. On that day, the relatives of Zacharias and Elizabeth gathered for the young child's circumcision and for the sake of giving him a name. When they asked the father what name he wishes to give to his son and being dumb, he wrote on a tablet: "John." At that moment his tongue became loosed and he began to speak. The home of Zacharias was on the heights between Bethlehem and Hebron. The news of the appearance of the angel of God to Zacharias was spread throughout all of Israel, as well as of his dumbness and the loosening of his tongue at that moment when he wrote the name "John." The news concerning this even reached Herod. Therefore, when Herod sent soldiers to slay the children throughout Bethlehem, he directed men to the hilly dwelling place of the family of Zacharias to kill John also. However, Elizabeth promptly hid the child. Enraged, at this King Herod sent his executioners to Zacharias in the Temple to slay him (for it happened that it was Zacharias' turn again to serve in the Temple of Jerusalem). Zacharias was slain between the court and the temple and his blood coagulated and petrified on the stone pavers and remained a perpetual witness against Herod. Elizabeth hid with the child in a cave where she died soon after. The young child John remained in the wilderness alone under the care of God and God's angels.

2. SAINT NICETAS, BISHOP OF REMESIANA

Nicetas was a friend and the same age as St. Paulinus of Nola (January 23). It appears that he was a Slav and, as such, preached the Gospel among the Slavs in the region of Nish and Pirot. The kind of change that St. Nicetas did among the Slavs is best shown in the hymn which St. Paulinus composed about St. Nicetas: "O what a change! And how fortunate!" Until then the impassible and bloody mountains concealing robbers now converted into monks; cadets of peace. Where once the habits of wild beasts, there is now the feature of angels. The righteous one hides in a cave where earlier, the evildoer dwelled. The episcopal see of Nicetas was Remesiana which some understand to be Pirot. Along with his missionary service, St. Nicetas also wrote several books such as the six books about Faith and a book about a fallen maiden (which aroused many to repentance). Saint Nicetas reposed in the Lord in the fifth century.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS ORENTIUS, PHARNACIUS, EROS, FIRMUS, FIRMINUS, CYRIACUS AND LONGINUS

They were all brothers and Roman soldiers during the reign of Emperor Maximian. When the Romans were waging war against the Scythians beyond the Danube river, St. Orentius came forth to battle with Marathom, the Scythian Goliath, and slew him. Because of this, the entire Roman army offered sacrifices to the gods but Orentius, with his brothers, declared that they were Christians and could not offer sacrifices to the deaf and dumb idols. Regardless of their military merits, they were condemned to exile to the Caspian region however, along the way, all seven, one after the other, died from hunger and sufferings and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

By God's miracle, John entered the world,
As once did Sarah's and Abraham's Isaac,
By God's miracle, remained alive
From Herod's bloody knife.
The knife, the young child John missed,
But John's father, it did not miss;
By God's miracle, John in the desert
For thirty years, he sustained himself,
To the servant of God angels are shepherds,
To the poor angels are guardians!
John grew loveable lamb,
The Lamb of God to serve,
To proclaim the bright day, before the sun,
The Unknown, recognized and glorified.
Of the great prophets, the last
And of God's apostles, the beginning.
As Elijah, with God he speaks
And as an apostle, loves and rebukes,
Of the high priest, wondrous son,
Of the martyr of God, the first-born brother.

REFLECTION

One of the differences between the eloquent philosophy of the Greeks [Hellenes] and the Christian Faith is that the entire Hellenistic philosophy can clearly be expressed with words and comprehended by reading, while the Christian Faith cannot be clearly expressed by words and even less comprehended by reading alone. When you are expounding the Christian Faith, for its understanding and acceptance, both reading and the practice of what is read are necessary. When Patriarch Photius read the words of Mark the Ascetic concerning the spiritual life he noticed a certain unclarity with the author for which he wisely said: "That [unclarity] does not proceed from the obscurity of expression but from that truth which is expressed there; it is better understood by means of practice (rather than by means of words) and that cannot be explained by words only." And this, the great patriarch adds, "It is not the case with these homilies nor only with these men but rather with all of those who attempted to expound the ascetical rules, passions and instructions, which are better understood from practice alone."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous recognition of the Elder Simeon the Receiver of God: **"And he came by inspiration of the Spirit into the Temple. And when his parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the Law:"** (St. Luke 2:27):

1. How this holy elder recognized by the spirit the helpless Child as Lord and Messiah, while the blinded scribes and priests did not recognize Him neither then nor when He worked numerous miracles and revealed unheard of wisdom;
2. How also my soul, if it grew old in sin, cannot recognize the Lord.

HOMILY

-Against malicious rejoicing-

"Rejoice not when your enemy falls and when he stumbles, let not your heart exult" (Proverbs 24:17).

He is a man, do not rejoice in his fall. He is your brother, let not your heart skip for joy when he stumbles. God created him for life and God does not rejoice in his fall. And you also, do not rejoice at that which grieves God. When man falls, God loses; would you rejoice in the loss of your Creator, your Parent? When the angels weep would you rejoice?

When your enemy falls, pray to God for him that God will save him and give thanks to God that you did not also fall in the same manner. You are of the same material, both you and he, as two vessels from the hand of the potter. If one vessel breaks should the other smile and rejoice? Behold, a small stone, which broke that vessel waits only for another's hand to raise it and then to destroy this vessel also. Both vessels are of the same material and a small stone can destroy a hundred vessels.

When one sheep is lost, should the remaining flock rejoice? No. They should not rejoice. For behold, the shepherd leaves his flock and, concerned, goes to seek the lost sheep. The loss of the shepherd is the loss of the flock. Therefore, do not rejoice when your enemy falls, for neither your shepherd nor his shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, rejoices in his fall.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, extricate malicious joy from our hearts and in its place, plant in our hearts compassion and brotherly love.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE FEMALE-MARTYR FEBRONIA [FEVRONIA]

Febronia was the daughter of Prosporus, a senator from Rome. In order to avoid marriage with a mortal man, Febronia betrothed herself to Christ and was tonsured a nun in the east, in the country of Assyria, in a convent where her aunt Bryaena was abbess. Lysimachus, the son of a nobleman, desired to wed Febronia but since Emperor Diocletian suspected him to be a secret Christian, he sent Lysimachus to the east with his uncle Silenus to apprehend and kill Christians. Silenus was as cruel as a beast and exterminated Christians everywhere without mercy. Lysimachus, on the contrary, spared the Christians wherever he could and hid them from his beast-like uncle. Making Palmyra a wasteland of Christians, Silenus came to the town of Nisibis close to which was a convent with fifty ascetics among whom was Febronia. Even though she was only twenty years old, Febronia was respected in the convent and in the town because of her great meekness, wisdom and restraint. In this convent the rule of the former abbess Blessed Platonida was adhered to in that every Friday be spent only in prayer and the reading of the sacred books without any other type of work. Bryaena had designated Febronia to read the sacred books to the sisters hidden behind a curtain so that no one would be distracted and captivated by the beauty of her face. Hearing about Febronia, Silenus ordered that Febronia be brought to him. But, when the holy virgin refused to deny Christ and to agree to enter into marriage with a mortal man, Silenus ordered her to be whipped, and after that to knock out her teeth, cut off her hands, breasts then legs and finally to slay her with a sword. However, a horrible punishment from God befell the torturer the same day. A rage entered into him and he was overcome by a deadly horror. In this horror he struck his head against a marble pillar and fell dead. Lysimachus ordered that Febronia's body be gathered and brought to the convent where it was honorably buried and he, with many other soldiers, were baptized. Many healings have occurred from the relics of St. Febronia and she appeared on the day of her feast and stood in her usual place among the sisters and all the sisters looked upon her with fear and rejoicing. St. Febronia suffered and took up habitation in eternal blessedness in the year 310 A.D. In the year 363 A.D., her relics were translated to Constantinople.

2. VENERABLE DIONYSIUS

Dionysius was the founder of the monastery of St. John (Dionysiat) on Mt. Athos. He was born in Koritza in Albania. His older brother Theodosius withdrew to Mt. Athos where, in time, he became the abbot of the monastery Philotheou. When St. Dionysius had matured he went to his brother in Philotheou and his brother tonsured him a monk. By divine providence, while in Constantinople on a work assignment for the monastery, Theodosius was chosen and consecrated as metropolitan of Trebizond. A wondrous light began to appear every night to Dionysius on the spot where he later built the monastery of St. John the Forerunner. Explaining the appearance of this light as a sign from heaven that he should build a monastery there, Dionysius traveled to Trebizond to seek help from his brother Theodosius and Emperor Alexius Comnenis. The emperor gave him both money and a royal charter, which is still preserved in the monastery. Dionysius founded the monastery of St. John the Forerunner in the year 1380 A.D. At one time, when pirates plundered the monastery, Dionysius again traveled to Trebizond and died there at the age of seventy-two. The monastery of Dionysiat still continues and flourishes even today. There is an icon of the All-holy Birth-giver of God in that monastery called "The Praise" which Emperor Alexius Comnenis donated to Dionysius. According to tradition, the Akathist to the Theotokos [Birth-giver of God] composed by Patriarch Sergius was read for the first time.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT FEBONIA

**The virgin Febronia, confesses Christ
Before judgment standing, bloody and pale.
As a palm branch, the young Febronia.
From beautiful fruit, a branch became heavy,
And to Silenus she speaks: "A Bridegroom, have I,
And no type of honor, from you do I accept,
Christ is my glory, Christ is my pride,
O yes, the beautiful countenance of my Bridegroom!
Cut off, cut off my feet - paths they have traveled!
Cut off, cut off my hands - work they have completed!
Cut out, cut out my tongue - with my heart I will pray!
Smash, smash my mouth - with my heart, I will speak!
Whip, crush the body - why do I need the body?
A more beautiful garment, the Bridegroom has prepared,
Among many holy ones, in the heavens above,
Among the angels, in sweet Paradise.
Do not think Silenus, that when I depart,
That the fury of your life will die.
But hear me and remember: behold the same day
Before the Living God, together we will go:
You as a torturer and I, tortured by you,
Each, his deeds, will bring with him.**

REFLECTION

St. Mark the ascetic said: "Whoever desires to eliminate future tribulations must bear the present tribulations with joy." Men consider slander as a great tribulation and there are few men who bear this tribulation without grumbling. O beautiful is the fruit of kindly endured tribulation! Tribulation is given to us for good spiritual commerce and we are missing the opportunity thus remaining empty-handed at the market place. Behold, even Athanasius, Basil, Chrysostom, Macarius, Sisoës and thousands of other followers of the Most-slandered One were themselves slandered. But God, Who orders all things for our salvation, had so ordered that on the thorn of slander would sprout fragrant roses of glory for all those who are slandered for His Name. Had Stephen not been slandered would he have seen the heavens opened and seen the glory of God in the heavens? And the slander against Joseph the Chaste One, did it not serve to his greater glory?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous fishing in the deep: **"But when He had ceased speaking, He said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch' " (St. Luke 5:4):**

1. How the apostles went out into the deep and, with the blessing of the Lord, caught an abundance of fish;
2. How I am empty and hungry while I stand in the shallow [physical] senses and here fish for power and wisdom;
3. How I should enter into the spiritual depths, with the blessing of the Lord, and there to catch a good catch.

HOMILY

-About today's day and tomorrow's day-

"Boast not of tomorrow, for you know not what any day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

Brethren, let us not boast of that which is not in our power. The Lord has placed the times and the years under His power and He disposes of them. Only God Himself alone knows whether tomorrow's day will number us among the living or the dead. Some have died on the eve of their marriage; again, others have descended into the grave on the eve of their coronation with a royal diadem. Therefore, let no one say that tomorrow will be for me the happiest day of my life; tomorrow, I enter into marriage! Or, tomorrow I will be crowned with a royal diadem! Or, tomorrow I am going to a great feast! Or, tomorrow a great gain is coming to me! O, let no one speak of the happiness of tomorrow's day. Behold, yet this night your soul may depart your body and tomorrow you will find yourself surrounded by black demons in the tollhouses [Mitarstvo]! And yet, even this night, a man can be separated from his relatives and friends, from wealth and honor, from the sun and the stars and find himself in a totally unknown company, in an unseen place and at an unexpected judgment.

Instead of boasting of tomorrow's day, it would be better to pray to God to "Give us this day our daily bread." Perhaps today's day may be our last day on earth. That is why it is better to spend this day in repentance for all our past days on earth rather than vainly fantasizing about tomorrow's day, about the day which perhaps will not dawn for us. Vain fantasizing about tomorrow's day cannot bring us any good, but repentance for one day with tears can save us from eternal fire.

O righteous Lord, burn up the insane vanity that is in us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE DAVID

David was born in Thessalonica. At first, he lived a life of asceticism in the proximity of Thessalonica in a hut built beneath an almond tree. Later, he continued his asceticism in Thessaly. So much did he purify himself by fasting, prayer and all-night vigils that he was made worthy to receive great grace from God. Once he took live coals in his hand, placed incense on the coals and censured the emperor without any injury to his hand. Seeing this, the emperor bowed down to the ground before him. He amazed many people by his numerous miracles. He died peacefully and took up habitation in eternal blessedness in the year 540 A.D.

2. THE FEAST OF THE ICON OF TIKHVIN [TICHVINE]

This icon of the Holy Birth-giver of God [the Theotokos] was first in Constantinople but in 1383 A.D., seventy years before the fall of Constantinople in 1453 A.D., it suddenly appeared in the sky near the town of Tikhvin in northern Russia. There, where it descended to the ground, a monastic community and church were established. The icon is named after the town of Tikhvin. Countless miracles were wrought from this miraculous icon; especially many of the sick received healing from it.

3. THE FEAST OF THE HOLY ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, THE GUIDE [HODIGITRIA]

The Evangelist Luke himself painted [wrote] this icon on wood. The All-holy Birth-giver of God saw this icon and blessed it. St. Luke donated this icon to the statesman Theophilus for whom he wrote the Acts of the Apostles. From Antioch, this icon was later brought to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem, Empress Eudocia took it and sent it to Constantinople as a gift to the emperor's sister, the pious Pulcheria. Pulcheria placed the icon in the church of Blachernae, her own memorial church. The All-holy Birth-giver of God once appeared to two blind men and led them into the church of Blachernae before her icon and there, restored their sight. Because of this, this icon was called Hodigitria the Guide. When the army of the Persian King Chozroes and the Scythian King Kagan attacked Constantinople, Patriarch Sergius brought this icon out to the ramparts of the city and processed with it around the ramparts. The All-holy Birth-giver of God then saved the Christians from the non-Christians. The armies of the adversaries became confused, the sea became agitated, the boats sank and the enemies who remained alive fled. From that time, the commemoration of this miracle of the All-holy Birth-giver of God was instituted on the fifth Sunday of the Honorable Fast Season [Lent] by chanting the Akathist. During the time of iconoclasm, this icon was brought to the monastery of the Pantocrator and there it was sealed in a wall and a votive light was left there to burn in front of it. As it was sealed, so it was later found.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE FEAST OF THE ICON OF THE BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD [THEOTOKOS] OF LYDDA OR OF ROME

The icon of the Mother of God of Lydda
Patriarch Herman, a prisoner for the Faith,
From Constantinople, sent to the Pope
When the east suffered for icons.
The icon upon the water set out,
Faster than the boats that sail the sea,
Lighter than water and of the Zypher,
Atop the waves, water it touches not.
For a long time, the icon in Rome remained
Much time, many years,
Until the iconoclastic emperors
From battle with Christ, ceased from fatigue
And when golden peace, the east gilded
The icon of Lydda returned home,
Lighter than water and of the Zypher
Atop the waves, water it touches not.
Two capital cities [Constantinople and Rome], two martyrs,
The power of the Birth-giver of God, recognized,
Power most wonderful, the icon of Lydda
That raises the dead and heals the sick.

REFLECTION

Until his last breath ceaseless repentance is necessary for a Christian. St. Mark the Ascetic says: "Think and you will see that the mystery of devotion in the chosen ones of God was realized through repentance." Repentance, even at the hour of death! This case occurred: an old ascetic and renowned spiritual father was dying and he called for a priest to administer Holy Communion to him. Along the way a robber joined the priest and desired to see for himself how a holy man dies. The holy elder peacefully received Holy Communion and peacefully talked with the priest. The robber then wept and said: "Blessed are you! Alas, what kind of death will I be worthy of?" The holy elder suddenly became proud and responded to him: "Be as I am and it will be to you as it is to me!" The robber returned along the road weeping all the time and lamenting over himself and, at that moment, dropped dead. Then the people saw a "fool for Christ" as he weeps over the holy elder and dances and sings over the robber. When he was asked the reason for this, he replied: "By the pride of that one [the elder] he lost all merits; the repentance of this one [the robber] he reaped all the fruits."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the bent over woman: **"And behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent over and utterly unable to look upwards" (St. Luke 13:11):**

1. How the Lord placed His hands on the deformed woman and the woman straightened up;
2. How my soul is deformed as the woman and is bent over to the ground;
3. How the Lord can put His hand on my soul, i.e., His Holy Spirit and the deformity will immediately be straightened up.

HOMILY

-About the fear of the wicked man-

"The wicked man flees although no one pursues him; but the just man, like a lion feels sure of himself" (Proverbs 28:1).

Wicked men are even afraid of shadows; to them shadows of trees seem as an army. Wherever something rustles, the wicked man thinks; the avenger comes! The trembling of leaves, he hears as a sound of chains; he takes the voices of birds as the shout of hunters who give chase after game; he sees grass as a spy of his evil deed; water, as a witness against him; the sun, as a judge; the stars, as those who taunt him. O my brethren, how many lies are born out of fear? For fear is of sin, sin is of the devil and the devil is the father of all lies.

Fear is the first-fruit of sin. When Adam sinned, he hid from the face of God. And when God cried out, Adam said: **"I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid" (Genesis 3:10)**. Before sin, Adam did not know about fear; neither did he hide from the face of God but, on the contrary, always hurried to encounter God. And as soon as he sinned, he "was afraid."

"But the just man, like a lion feels sure of himself." Without sin, without fear. Without sin, without weakness. The sinless ones are powerful, very powerful and brave, very brave. The righteous ones are strong and fearless. Such are the righteous ones, only the righteous ones.

O Sinless Lord, save us from empty fear but before that, preserve us from sin, the parent of fear.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT SAMPSON, THE HOSPITABLE ONE WHO RECEIVED STRANGERS

Sampson was born of wealthy and eminent parents in old Rome where he studied all the secular sciences of that time and dedicated himself particularly to the science of medicine. Sampson was compassionate and an unmercenary and administered cures to the sick, both body and soul, counseling everyone to fulfill the requirements of the Christian Faith. Afterward he moved to Constantinople where he lived in a small house from which he dispensed alms, comfort, counsel, hope and medicine to all just as the sun disperses its rays of light and, in general, gave help to the helpless, both spiritually and physically. The patriarch heard of the great virtues of this man and ordained him a priest. At that time, Emperor Justinian the Great became ill and his illness, according to the conviction of all physicians, was incurable. The emperor prayed to God with great fervency and God revealed in a dream to him that Sampson would heal him. And indeed, when the emperor learned of Sampson, he invited him to his court and just as the elder placed his hand on the ailing place, the emperor recovered. When the emperor offered him enormous wealth for this, Sampson thanked him and did not want to accept anything saying to him: "O Emperor, even I had gold and silver and other goods, but I left all for the sake of Christ in order to gain eternal heavenly goods." But when the emperor insisted on doing something for him, holy Sampson implored the emperor to build him a home [hospice] for the poor. In this home Sampson served the poor as a parent serves his children. Mercy toward the poor and the helpless was natural to him. Finally, this saintly man, completely filled with heavenly power and goodness, reposed peacefully on June 27, 530 A.D. and was interred in the church of his relative, the holy martyr Mocius. After his death, Sampson appeared many times to those who called upon him for assistance.

2. SAINT SEVERUS, THE PRESBYTER

Severus lived in central Italy and was a man of extraordinary sanctity. Once he was summoned to hear the confession of and to administer Holy Communion to a man who was dying but because of working in his vineyard, he was late. The news reached him that the sick man had died. Completely frightened as though he had killed the man, Severus began to weep bitterly over the deceased. By his fervent prayer, God restored life to the dead man. Then Severus heard his confession, gave him Holy Communion and prepared him for a Christian departure from this world. On the eighth day, the man again died.

3. SAINT JOANNA, THE MYRRH-BEARER

Joanna was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward: "**Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward**" (St. Luke 8:3). When Herod beheaded John the Baptist he disposed of his head in an unclean place. Joanna removed the head of the Baptist and buried it honorably on the Mount of Olives on Herod's estate. Later, during the reign of Constantine the Great, the head of John the Baptist was discovered. St. Joanna is also remembered as being present both at the suffering and at the resurrection of the Lord. She died peacefully.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SEVERUS

When a dead person came to life, men asked him;
Tell us, where were you and who awakened you?
In the place of fear and horror, I was,
In the company of black ones, wolves and dogs,
In the depths, full of every uncleanness,
In the bottomless pit of darkness, without a single ray.
And when my soul, despair overcame
By the hand, a radiant young man took me.
Then, from the depths, a cool current blew
And against me charged black ones with heads of dogs:
This one, he is ours, he is ours, where are you taking him now?
As a citizen of Hades, do you not recognize him?
To that the angel said: Severus, for him, is praying!
And by the will of God, I am taking him,
In the body once more he must appear,
Behold, to confess him, Severus is seeking!
To confess him and Holy Communion to administer to him.
Armies of evil and recalcitrants, stay away!
Thus the angel said and, with me, flew away
Throughout the cold Hades, throughout the bottomless darkness,
Until at holiness arrived, even to my body.
That is the history of me, the deceased.
O, to be confessed, what a treasure it is
And Communicated to enter into the world of eternity!

REFLECTION

There is no one so stupid as he who cannot see his own sins and cannot see the virtues of others. There is no one so enlightened as he who can see and recognize his own sins and the virtues of others. Those who only see the faults of others and criticize them, St. John Chrysostom equates them to flies that fall on the wounds of others, not in order to heal them but rather to gnaw and to poison them more." God has sent us here for penance [Epitimija]," these are the words of Blessed Theophilus of Kiev (+1853). He who knows and feels that he is here for repentance immerses himself in silence and contemplation about his own sin, which has brought him to repentance. The same Blessed Theophilus further said: "Weep also for the sins of your fellow man; without this not one created human being will be saved." To weep or to proclaim - how is it written my son? With Blessed Theophilus, it is written: "To weep over one's own sins but with Satan, to proclaim the sins of others." About himself, Blessed Theophilus at the point of death left this testament to his brethren: "Remember the odious Theophilus!" This is the testament of the holiest human being in Kiev in the year 1853 A.D.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the man ill with dropsy: **"And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy" (St. Luke 14:2):**

1. How the Lord touched the man with dropsy and he became whole and went home;
2. How my soul - being under the burden of "the love of the body" - under the burden of the illness of dropsy;
3. How only the Lord with one touch can heal the dropsy of my soul and free it of the excessive burden of passionate dampness.

HOMILY

-About shelter from on high-

"He who trusts in the Lord is safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

The righteous man is under the shelter of the Lord, under the shelter from on high. Water will not reach him nor will the flood drown him. Even the flood did not drown Noah for the Lord was the shelter from on high.

However, brethren, there is a flood worse than a watery flood, i.e., the flood of passions. When the passions begin to burn, when they begin to smoke and begin to turn black, when they emit and spread their stench all around, where will man flee, and who will save him? Only under the hand of the Lord, only under His shelter from on high. The flood of passions had pursued David but he fled and found shelter under the hand of the Lord; he saved himself from fire, from smoke and the stench of pursuing passions under the shelter from on high.

A man does not save himself from a flood only God saves. God is the Master of the clouds and the tamer of passions. Indeed, He is the shelter from on high. We flee to Him and hide ourselves under His garment. A dog appears like a lion toward the beggar but, before the feet of his master, the dog appears as an empty sack.

O Lord Most-high, Who sits on the throne on high, You are our shelter on high. Be merciful to us our Creator and extend Your hand that we be lifted up to Your shelter. Save us from the turbulent waters [passions] which rush to drown us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS CYRUS AND JOHN

These holy martyrs are celebrated on January 31. On that date, their lives and sufferings are chronicled. June 28 commemorates the translation of their relics from Canopus to Menuthis and the numerous miracles which occurred over their relics. St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, prayed fervently to God to destroy the idolatrous impurity in the town of Menuthis where a pagan temple was located and where the power of the demons ruled. An angel of God appeared to the patriarch and told him that Menuthis would be cleansed of its impurity if he translated the relics of Saints Cyrus and John to that town. The patriarch did this immediately. He translated the relics of the martyrs to Menuthis and built a church there in honor of Saints Cyrus and John. Ammonius, the son of Julian the mayor of Alexandria, was healed of scorfula; a Theodore healed of blindness; Isidore of Menuthis was cured of a decaying disease of the liver; the wife of Theodore from poisoning, a Eugenia of dropsy as well as many other people were healed of various diseases and torments by the relics of these saints. This all occurred in the year 412 A.D.

2. VENERABLE SENNUPHIUS, "THE STANDARD-BEARER"

Sennuphius was a great ascetic and miracle-worker of the Egyptian desert. He was a contemporary of Patriarch Theophilus and Emperor Theodosius the Great. He is called the "Standard-bearer" because by his prayers he once helped Emperor Theodosius to gain a victory over the army of his adversaries. When the emperor summoned Sennuphius to Constantinople, Sennuphius replied that he was unable to do so but sent him his tattered monastic habit and staff. Setting out to battle the emperor donned Sennuphius' monastic habit and carried the staff and returned victorious from battle.

3. VENERABLE PAUL, THE PHYSICIAN

Paul was a Corinthian by birth. Completing his schooling, Paul withdrew to a monastery and was tonsured a monk. He had a difficult struggle with the impure spirit of fornication. However, when with the power of the cross he drove the impure spirit of fornication away from himself, that spirit created a malicious falsehood, i.e., [the spirit] gave approval to a depraved woman to say that she had given birth to a child by Paul. The heretics then dragged him from the monastery, placed the child in his arms and forced him to walk throughout the town for the people to spit on him. The baby was only a few days old. St. Paul prayed fervently to God and said to the people: "Behold, let the child himself say who is his father." The child stretched out its hand from the swaddling clothes and pointed to a blacksmith and said: "That man is my father and not Paul the monk!" The adversaries of Paul became ashamed and God granted great healing powers to Paul so that when he placed his hand on the sick, they became whole. Paul reposed peacefully in old age pleasing God by his life on earth. He lived in the seventh century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SENNUPHIUS

Sennuphius the Elder, in the wilderness fasts,
His body passionless, as dry bones,
But from a dry stone, as water one time,
From him flows, the Grace of the Holy Spirit;
In a deadened body, is hidden a spirit powerful
That, the glorious Emperor Theodosius heard,
And, when to set out for war, the emperor wanted,
Invited the Elder Sennuphius to come,
His blessing to give, that the emperor the devil to crush,
Numerous gifts to him, the emperor promised.
The Elder Sennuphius, into tears broke out,
To Emperor Theodosius, a reply he sends,
The roads are too distant, that he cannot come,
And with worries, cannot confuse his prayer,
For every gift, gives thanks to the emperor
And to him [Theodosius], his old monastic habit he sends,
Along with the cassock, an old staff he sends,
This, to the emperor, the gifts from the monk were!
The staff, let the emperor to take, and the habit to don,
And, in battle, every adversary he will defeat.
As a monk attired, the emperor for battle set out
Glorious victor from battle he returned.
The emperor, a pillar of victory in the city erected,
His likeness as a monk on top of the pillar, he placed,
That the faith of Emperor Theodosius, the world remembers
And of Saint Sennuphius, the miraculous power.

REFLECTION

Protestants have rejected the miracles of God through material things. By doing this they thought to despiritualize the Christian Faith however, in doing this, they have impoverished and deformed Christianity. They have rejected the action of God's power through icons, through the relics of the saints, through the Cross and, finally, some of them even through the power of Holy Communion. If they were to follow this erroneous path, they would have to reject even the miracles which have occurred from the living body of the Lord Jesus, for His body was material; the same with the miracles by the touch of the apostles' hands and the hands of the saints, for these hands are also material and not even to mention the rod of Moses, or the vesture of the All-holy Birth-giver of God, of the handkerchief of the Apostle Paul and so forth. In their rejection, Protestants stand in contradiction to the entire ancient Church. Here is one out of thousands and thousands of proofs that God acts through things, especially when He wants to glorify His saints: there was a tall pillar erected in Alexandria bearing the statue of Emperor Theodosius dressed in monastic habit and with a monastic staff in his hand. This pillar served as a memorial of the emperor's victory which he, clad in the monastic habit of St. Sennuphius and with Sennuphius' staff in his hands, carried against his adversaries. When God wills, then even one garment of a saint conquers the powerful armies of unbelievers. Who would dare to limit the actions or the methods of action of the power of the Almighty God?

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the ten lepers: **"And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers which stood afar off" (St. Luke 17:12):**

1. How the Lord by the power of His word healed the ten lepers who prayed to Him;
2. How, even I, spiritually and morally leprous, the Lord can heal if I cry out to Him.

HOMILY

-About holiness-

"But as the One who called you is holy, be you also holy in all your behavior" (1 Peter 1:15).

Brethren, holiness is a virtue which encompasses all other virtues. Hence brethren, a saint is a man adorned with all virtues. But if a man is prayerful and is not compassionate, he cannot be called holy. Or, if a man endures but without faith and hope he cannot be numbered among the saints. Or, if a man is very compassionate but without faith in God in truth, such a man cannot be numbered among the saints. A saint is a perfect man such as Adam was in Paradise; or even better, such as the New Adam was, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Saint above the saints. This is the Sower of holiness on earth and the Nurturer of the saints in history. He called us to the dignity of the saints. He showed us the example of a true saint. He is the prototype of the saints as He is the arch-type of man. A true man, my brethren, does not mean anything else but a saint. A saint and a man, that is one and the same. He showed us what it means to be a man and what it means to be a saint. The Apostle Peter commands us: "Be you also holy in all your [living] behavior!" A saint is not a saint in one aspect of his life but rather in every aspect of his entire life. We must be holy in every work and aspect of our life in order to be numbered among the saints, i.e., among men according to the prototype of the saints and the arch-type of man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

O All-holy Lord, To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE PETER

Peter was the son of Jonah and the brother of Andrew, the First-called. He was of the Tribe of Simeon from the town of Bethsaida. He was a fisherman and, at first, was called Simon but the Lord was pleased to call him Cephas or Peter: **"And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, He said, You are Simon the son of Jonah: you shall be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a rock" (St. John 1:42).** He was the first of the disciples to clearly express faith in the Lord Jesus saying: **"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (St. Matthew 16:16).** His love for the Lord was great and his faith in the Lord gradually strengthened. When the Lord was brought to trial, Peter denied Him three times but after only one glance into the face of the Lord, Peter's soul was filled with shame and repentance. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter appears as a fearless and powerful preacher of the Gospel. Following one of his sermons in Jerusalem, three-thousand souls converted to the Faith. He preached the Gospel throughout Palestine and Asia Minor, throughout Illyria and Italy. Peter worked many powerful miracles; he healed the sick, resurrected the dead; the sick were healed even from his shadow. He had a great struggle with Simon the Magician who proclaimed himself as god but in reality Simon was a servant of Satan. Finally, Peter shamed and defeated him. By order of the evil Emperor Nero, Simon's friend, Peter was condemned to death. Installing Linus as Bishop of Rome, counseling and comforting the flock of Christ, Peter proceeded joyfully to his death. Seeing the cross before him, he begged his executioners to crucify him upside down for he considered himself unworthy to die as did his Lord. Thus the great servant of the Great Lord reposed and received the wreath of eternal glory.

2. THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul was born in Tarsus of the tribe of Benjamin. At first, he was called Saul, studied under Gamaliel, was a Pharisee and a persecutor of Christianity. He was miraculously converted to the Christian Faith by the Lord Himself Who appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He was baptized by the Apostle Ananias, was called Paul and numbered in the service of the great apostles. With a fiery zeal, Paul preached the Gospel everywhere from the borders of Arabia to Spain, among the Jews and among the Gentiles. He received the title "Apostle to the Gentiles." As horrible as his sufferings were, so much more was his super human patience. Throughout all the years of his preaching Paul, from day to day, hung as one on a weak thread between life and death. Since he fulfilled all days and nights with labor and suffering for Christ, since he organized the Church in many places and since he attained such a degree of perfection he was able to say: **"It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).** Paul was beheaded in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero at the same time as the Apostle Peter.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PETER SAINT PAUL

Unlearned and learned but equal in spirit
And in the love of God, as strong as angels,
Peter a simple man, Paul educated
Both illumined, by the grace of the Spirit,
Two flaming candles, unquenchable candles,
Towering and beautiful, two brilliant stars.
Traversed the earth and spread the light
Nothing did they take, to men they gave all,
Completely poor, the world they enriched,
Prisoners and servants, conquered the entire world,
With the teaching of Christ, enriched the world,
With a new weapon, conquered the entire world:
By humility and peace and meekness blessed,
Prayer and fasting and mercy powerful.
When to them, that stormy day, arrived the stormy night
Bloodthirsty Nero, their life cut short.
But when the ruler of the world, a command issued
And to suffering, gave over Peter and Paul
The world was theirs and not his [Nero's] anymore,
By death, the apostles gained the Kingdom.

REFLECTION

Simon Peter and Simon the Magician. The enemies of Christianity frequently like to cite examples of great miracle-workers among the pagans in order to deceive the gullible, to humiliate the Christian Faith and to elevate paganism, sorcery, soothsaying, Satanism and every other charlatanism. There is no doubt that Satan through his servants also attempted to perform miracles but all of the miracles of his servants do not emanate out of love for man, compassion and from faith in God but rather from pride, selfishness, vanity and hatred for mankind. A Christian should learn from the history of the apostles to differentiate divine miracles from satanic deceptions and fantasies. Let the Christian only remember the Apostle Peter and Simon the Magician. Let the Christian compare the miracles of Peter with the so-called miracles of Simon. The apostle converted the stony hearts of men into noble hearts, cured the sick, and raised the dead and all of this by prayer and faith in the Living God. However, Simon the Magician amazed men with the devil's illusions. The Apostle Peter was a friend of God and Simon the Magician was a friend and protégé of the perverted Emperor Nero who ended his life by suicide. The miracles of the pagan fakirs belong to the category of illusions and deceptions of Simon the Magician. Just as from a distance hot sand resembles water so also the "miracles" of the fakir resemble the life-creating miracles of Christianity.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous healing of the blind Bartimeus: **"And they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a very great crowd, Bartimeus, a blind man, the son of Timeus, was sitting by the wayside begging" (St. Mark 10:46):**

1. How Bartimeus prayed to the Lord: "Have mercy on me!"
2. How the Lord said: "See!" And he saw;
3. How the word of the Lord can give sight to my blinded soul if I pray.

HOMILY

-About the fear of God-

"Conduct yourselves with fear in the time of your sojourning" (1 Peter 1:17).

These are the words of the great Apostle Peter, words that have a dual foundation: heavenly inspiration and personal experience. By divine inspiration, Peter, a simple fisherman, became a teacher of the people, a pillar of the Faith and a powerful miracle-worker. According to his own experience he learned that all of his wisdom and power was of God and, because of that, one should possess the fear of God. No other fear, except the fear of God.

The foolish one becomes frightened only when lightning flashes and thunder cracks but the wise man fears God every day and every hour. The Creator of lightning and thunder is more awesome than both of them and He does not appear before you, from time to time, as lightning and thunder rather He is continually before you and does not move away from you. That is why it is not enough, from time to time, to have fear of God, but one must breathe in the fear of God. The fear of God is the ozone in the suffocating atmosphere of our soul. This ozone brings purity, easiness, sweet fragrance and health. Until he had become strengthened in the fear of God, Peter was only Peter and not an apostle, hero, teacher of the people and miracle-worker.

O my brethren, let us not rejoice before the harvest. This, our life, is not a harvest but rather, it is a sowing, labor, sweat and fear. The plowman lives in fear until he has gathered the fruits from the field. Let us also delay our rejoicing for the day of harvest, for now is the time for labor and fear. Will I be saved? This question should torment every one of us, in the same way that the plowman is tormented by the question: "Will I reap the fruit of my labor in the field?" The plowman labors and fears everyday. Let us also labor and fear "all the time of our sojourning" on earth.

O awesome and powerful Lord, sustain us in Your fear.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE ASSEMBLY OF THE HOLY GLORIOUS AND PRAISE WORTHY APOSTLES

Even though each one of the Twelve Great Apostles has their own special day of celebration throughout the year, nevertheless the Church has set aside this day as a festal assembly of all the apostles together and with them, Paul. These are the names and the separate days of the celebrations of the Holy Twelve:

SAINT PETER	June 29 and January 16
SAINT ANDREW	November 30
SAINT JAMES, THE SON OF ZEBEDEE	April 30
SAINT JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN	September 26 and May 8
SAINT PHILIP	November 14
SAINT BARTHOLOMEW	June 11 and August 25
SAINT THOMAS	October 6
SAINT MATTHEW THE EVANGELIST	November 16
SAINT JAMES, THE SON OF ALPHAEUS	October 9
SAINT THADDEUS OR JUDE, THE BROTHER OF JAMES	June 19
SAINT SIMON THE ZEALOT	May 10
SAINT MATTHIAS	August 9
SAINT PAUL	June 29

Let us also mention how each one of these most holy and most beneficial men in the history of the world ended their earthly life:

Saint Peter	St. Peter was crucified upside down.
Saint Andrew	St. Andrew was crucified.
Saint James, the son of Zebedee	St. James was beheaded.
Saint John the Theologian	St. John died in a miraculous manner.
Saint Philip	St. Philip was crucified.
Saint Bartholomew	St. Bartholomew was crucified, scrapped and beheaded.
Saint Thomas	St. Thomas was pierced with five spears.
Saint Matthew the Evangelist	St. Matthew was burned alive.
Saint James, the son of Alphaeus	St. James was crucified.
Saint Thaddeus or Jude, the Brother of James	St. Thaddeus was crucified.
Saint Simon the Zealot	St. Simon was crucified.
Saint Matthias	St. Matthias was stoned and then was beheaded after death.
Saint Paul	St. Paul was beheaded.

2. BLESSED PETER, THE CROWN-PRINCE

Peter, by descent, was a Tartar and the nephew of the Tartar King Berkai. He heard the words of salvation from Bishop Cyril of Rostov and those words adhered to his heart. And yet when he witnessed the miraculous healing of Berkai's son, by the help of Bishop Cyril's prayer, he secretly left the Golden Horde and fled to Rostov where he was baptized and where, with all his soul and mind, dedicated himself to asceticism and the study of the honorable Faith. Once at night, Saints Peter and Paul appeared to him in a dream on the shores of the lake and commanded him to build a church in their name on that same place and along with that, Blessed Peter received from the saints the necessary amount of money for that purpose. Indeed, Blessed Peter built a most beautiful church there in which he in old age, following the death of his wife, was tonsured a monk. Blessed Peter died peacefully in ripe old age on June 29, 1290 A.D. and his church became and remains a monastery called the Petrovski Monastery.

3. VENERABLE GEORGE, THE IBERIAN [GEORGIAN]

George was born in Iberia [Georgia] in 1014 A.D. and was a relative of the Georgian kings. George received a good classical education in his childhood but his heart drew him to the spiritual life. He lived a life of asceticism with the famous spiritual father George in the Black Mountain. He fled to Holy Mount Athos and continued his asceticism in the monastery Iveron. George became the abbot of Iveron. With the help of Emperor Constantine Monomachus he restored Iveron and covered the monastery church with lead. That lead roof remains even today. He translated the Holy Scriptures, the Prologue and books of the Divine Services into the Georgian language. King Bagrat invited him to Georgia to teach the people. George was royally welcomed in his homeland. He traveled everywhere and taught both the clergy and people. In his old age, he desired to die on Mt. Athos where he set out for but death overtook him in Constantinople in the year 1067 A.D. His relics were translated to Iveron. Even though he died on May 24, the monks of Iveron commemorate his memory on June 30 considering him to be as "equal to the apostles."

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLES

As a dry desert, the whole world was;
Across it [the world] the chariot of the Spirit flew
A fiery vision, the Holy Apostles;
The All-holy Spirit, through them, the universe rebuilt.
The rivers of wondrous grace flowed,
The dead desert, to life converted.
Wonderful Apostles, watery clouds,
Simple ones, wise ones, fishermen, heroes!
From the Ganges to the Thames, they carried the torch,
From the Nile to Pontus, holiness they proclaimed,
From variegated Persia to bronze Gaul,
Where the feet walk or the galleys sail
Everywhere, the miracle of the Incarnate God, brought,
Everywhere, the Name of the Resurrected Christ proclaimed,
Without complaint and fear, without any confusion:
Mountains and seas, to them were not obstacles,
The sword did not frighten them, nor persecution prevent them,
Neither all the fires of Hades which, against them, erupted.
Truth guided them and not a false fable:
Our life is Christ, and death a beautiful gain!
Thus, they spoke. To such as these, what could be done?
Crucify their bodies? Scrape their skins?
That, the world did, but what kind of harm did it do them?
To reign eternally! Thus, God judged.

REFLECTION

Concern for the good of all people! That concern filled the exalted spirits and noble hearts of the holy apostles. Writing about the Apostle Paul, St. John Chrysostom calls him: "The universal father of the world." "As though he", says Chrysostom, "gave birth to the entire world that he anxiously labored and tried to bring all into the Kingdom." Indeed, most exalted is this title: "Universal father of the world" and if this title could be attributed to anyone, other than God, it could only be attributed to the apostles of Christ. By their parental concern for the entire world, they in truth, were "the universal fathers of the world." There are many mothers in the world who care less about their own children than the apostles were concerned about the good of their persecutors and adversaries. The Apostle Peter twice saved his most bitter adversary, Simon the Magician, from death: once when the people wanted to burn him and another time when a dog wanted to tear him to pieces. Just think, how the world repaid these their benefactors! As if they were the greatest robbers and criminals. O how true are the words of St. Cyril who says: "As long as we are in the body, the same occurs to us Christians as to pagans, the difference is only in the spirit."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous repentance of the thief on the Cross: **"But the other one rebuked him: 'Have you no fear of God seeing you are under the same sentence?' " (St. Luke 23:40):**

1. How the sensible thief in his suffering senses God's closeness, repents and prays to God for salvation while the suffering of the insensible thief incites him to blaspheme God;
2. How because of sin I am a thief and because of sin I should be as that sensible thief whose suffering does not estrange him from God but rather draws him closer to God; God and salvation.

HOMILY

-About the power and the efficacy of good works-

"For such is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15).

Brethren, it is difficult to argue with an atheist; it is difficult to talk with an unreasonable man; it is difficult to convince an embittered man. It is difficult to convince the atheist, the unreasonable man and the embittered man with words. You will convince them easier by deeds. **"They may through observing you by reason of your good works glorify God" (1 Peter 2:12).** Do good deeds to those who wish to argue with you and you will win the argument. One deed of compassion will bring the unreasonable man to his senses and will pacify the embittered man quicker than many hours of conversation. If atheism, unreasonableness and bitterness stem from ignorance, that ignorance is as a fury, which can quickly be restrained by good works. If you argue with an atheist in his own rabid manner, you strengthen the fury of atheism. If you converse with the unreasonable by derision, the darkness of unreasonableness is increased. If you think you will overcome the embittered man with anger, you will stir up a greater fire of bitterness. A meek and good deed is like water over a fire. Always remember the holy apostles and their successful methods of behavior with men. If an atheist provokes you, the man does not provoke you but the devil provokes you: man by nature is religious. If the unreasonable man scolds you, the man does not scold you but the devil scolds you: man by nature is reasonable. If the embittered one persecutes you, then it is not the man who persecutes you but the devil who persecutes you: for man by nature is good. The devil provokes you to lengthy arguments and unfruitful conversations and flees from good deeds. Do good work in the Name of Christ and the devil will flee and only then will you have dealings with men, with true men; religious, reasonable and good men. Therefore whatever you do, do in the Name of the Lord.

O All-good Lord, help us to do good and by good to conquer in Your Name.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JULY

JULY -1-

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS COSMAS AND DAMIAN

Cosmas and Damian were unmercenary physicians and miracle-workers. These two saints were brothers, were born in Rome and as children were baptized and brought up in the Christian spirit. They possessed abundant grace from God to heal men and livestock from every disease and suffering, usually by the laying on of hands. They sought no reward for their efforts. They only required of the infirm to believe in Christ the Lord. Inheriting a large estate, they charitably distributed it to the needy and to those in want. At that time, Emperor Galerius reigned in Rome. As a persecutor of Christianity, he summoned these two holy brothers before him shackled in chains. After a prolonged interrogation the emperor ordered them to deny Christ and to offer sacrifices to the idols. Cosmas and Damian not only did not heed the emperor but also counseled him to abandon the dead idols and to recognize the One True God. "Our God is not created but He is the Creator of all, but your gods are the imaginations of man and the work of the hands of artists. If you did not have artists to make your gods, you would have no one to worship." After working a miracle upon the emperor himself-for they miraculously cured him from a grave infirmity - the emperor proclaimed his faith in Christ and released the holy brothers in peace. Cosmas and Damian continued to glorify God and to heal the sick and were themselves, glorified by the people on all sides. Envious of their glory, a certain doctor who, at one time was their teacher, and with the pretext to gather healing herbs, led them into the mountain and stoned them to death. They suffered honorably for the Faith of Christ in the year 284 A.D. Their memory remains eternal in the Church on earth and their souls took up habitation in the Kingdom of the Lord to live eternally in glory and in joy.

2. VENERABLE PETER, THE PATRICIAN

This saint was a nobleman from Constantinople and a commander during the reign of Emperor Nicephorus. In a war with the Bulgarians, Emperor Nicephorus was slain and Peter, with fifty Greek commanders and princes, was captured and cast into prison. St. John the Theologian miraculously freed Peter from prison. Peter then despised all earthly glory, left his wife and son, and withdrew to Mount Olympia where, as a monk and as a disciple of St. Joannicius the Great, lived a life of mortification for thirty-four years. Following the death of his wife and son, he settled in Constantinople where he spent eight more years in fasting and prayer and fell asleep in the Lord in the year 865 A.D. in the seventy-seventh year of his life.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR POTITUS

Potitus was a thirteen-year-old child who was born in Sardinia. He endured much suffering for Christ both from his father and from the civil persecutors of Christianity. Potitus was beheaded during the reign of Emperor Antoninus (138-161 A.D.) but, before this, Potitus cured and baptized Agnes, the daughter of the emperor.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT POTITUS

The young Potitus, the parent asked:
When your Faith is so true,
Would you for it give your life?
Potitus replied: The Savior promised,
To gird all of His faithful with strength,
That for Him one could easily suffer;
In that I hope, even I, and I believe much,
That I could suffer for my Christ.
Father, my God is great and glorious,
Miraculous and mighty, living and life giving.
He, the young David, helped in battle
That he decapitated the head of the terrible Goliath;
With me on the path of suffering, He will be
So that the dark and bitter death, I can endure.
When Gilas, the father, heard from his son,
As though, of divine wine, he drank,
And aloud cried out: where are my years!
Behold, from a child, truth I learned!
Baptism he received and was numbered among the faithful.
And in blood, the martyr Potitus was baptized.

REFLECTION

Through their prayers and alms for the deceased, Christians display the relationship between this world and the world to come. The Church in this world and the Church in the other world are one and the same - one body, one in being - as does the root of a tree beneath the earth comprise one organism with the trunk and the branches of the tree above the earth. It is clear from this how we who comprise the Church on earth can receive help from the saints and the righteous ones from the Heavenly Church as well as the deceased sinners in the other world can receive help from us on earth. St. Athanasius says: "As it happens with wine inside a barrel which, when the vineyard blooms in the field, senses it and the wine itself blossoms together with it, so it is with the souls of sinners. They receive some relief from the Bloodless Sacrifice offered for them and from charity" performed for their repose. St. Ephren the Syrian cites that same example with wine and the vineyard and concludes: "And so, when there exists such mutual sensitivity even among plants, is not the prayer and sacrifice felt even more for the departed ones?"

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous change of water into wine (**St. John 2**):

1. How the Lord, at the marriage at Cana, changed the water into wine;
2. How, even my soul, if it is wedded to the Living God, transforms its wateriness into divine beverage.

HOMILY

-About how we should rejoice in Christ-

"In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials" (1 Peter 1:6).

Thus speaks St. Peter the Apostle whose life was filled with many temptations and frequent sorrows. Thus speaks the man who left his home and family members and followed after Christ and who, for the sake of Christ, endured many difficulties: from hunger, from thirst, from the Jews, from the Romans, from false prophets, from cruel heathens and who, in the end was crucified on the cross, all for the sake of the Lord Christ. He, who in this life was unmercifully scourged with great sorrows and great temptations, counsels us to rejoice in Christ so that this joy may swallow up all our proportionally lessor sorrows and temptations.

But why brethren should we rejoice in Christ?

Because He revealed and showed us the reality of the greatest and most beautiful hopes and dreams of mankind;

He revealed to us the One God, Living, Omnipotent, All-wise All-merciful and He gave us the privilege to call ourselves His sons;

He revealed and showed us the immortal and eternal life; life incomparably better than this life on earth;

He revealed to us the spiritual kingdom; the kingdom of angels and the righteous; the kingdom of all good and the light of truth and justice;

He revealed and showed us the goal of our existence here on earth and the purpose for all our efforts and sufferings in this transient life;

He revealed to us the ocean of heavenly joy compared to all of our sorrows and temptations as a drop of muddy water, which cannot disturb or muddy that ocean.

O brethren, what joy awaits us! O brethren, how small a price does our Lord ask of us to purchase this joy in which the angels bathe and in which the righteous swim! Only to fulfill a few of His short commandments that is the entire price!

O Lord Jesus, the all-miraculous source of our joy, our boast and our pleasure, our glory and our thanks, place Your finger on our mouths and do not allow a drop of muddy sorrow and temptations to poison us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JULY - 2 -

1. THE PLACING OF THE GIRDLE OF THE ALL-HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD IN THE CHURCH OF BLACHERNAE IN CONSTANTINOPLE

During the reign of Emperor Leo the Great (458-471 A.D.), Empress Verina and Patriarch Gennadius, two noblemen from Constantinople, Galibus and Candidus, traveled throughout the Holy Land to venerate and to worship before the holy shrines. In Nazareth, they stopped for a while at the home of a Jewish maiden who kept the girdle of the All-Holy Mother of God in a secret room. Many who were ill and in need received healing from their sufferings through prayer and by touching the vesture. Galibus and Candidus took this sacred article and brought it to Constantinople and reported it to the emperor and patriarch. This brought about great joy in the imperial city. The vesture was solemnly translated and placed in the Church of Blachernae. This church was built by Emperor Marcian and Empress Pulcheria on the shore of an inlet and was called Blachernae after the name of a Scetis commander who was slain there. And in remembrance of the placing of this vesture of the All-Holy Birth giver of God in this Blacheran church, this feast day was instituted.

2. SAINT JUVENAL, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Juvenal was a contemporary of the great illuminators of the Orthodox Church: Euthymius, Theodosius, Gerasimus, Simeon the Stylite and others. He participated in two Ecumenical Councils: the Third Council in Ephesus [431 A.D.] and the Fourth Council in Chalcedon [451 A.D.]. With great power and zeal, he fought against the blasphemous heresies: in Ephesus against Nestorius who called the Birth-giver of God the Birth-giver of Christ and in Chalcedon against Eutyches and Dioscorus who taught that there was only one nature in Christ, i.e., only a divine nature without a human nature. Following the victory of Orthodoxy at both councils, Juvenal returned to his throne in Jerusalem. Even though the heresies were condemned, the heretics were not eliminated. Through the intrigue and violence of Theodosius, a friend of Dioscorus, Juvenal was banished from the patriarchal throne and Theodosius, on his own, elevated himself in Juvenal's place. In the beginning, this heretic Theodosius was supported by Empress Eudocia, the widow of Theodosius the Younger who, at that time, took up residence in Jerusalem. Hesitant and indiscreet, Eudocia finally went to see St. Simeon the Stylite in order to ask him wherein lies the truth. The saint of God unmasked all the heretical teachings and instructed the empress to adhere to the teachings of Orthodoxy as confirmed at the councils. The empress heeded, repented and she herself became embittered against the false Patriarch Theodosius. During that time Marcian and Pulcheria reigned in Constantinople. A letter from the emperor was sent to Commander Athanasius ordering him to banish Theodosius and to return and reinstate Juvenal to his throne which the commander quickly did. Juvenal governed the Church in Jerusalem for thirty-eight years as its hierarch and at a ripe old age presented himself to the Lord in the year 458 A.D. to receive from Him the reward for great suffering and misery which he had endured for the truth. During the reign of St. Juvenal, the celebration of Christmas was established on December 25.

3. SAINT PHOTIUS, METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW

Photius was of Greek descent. He prudently governed the Russian Church for twenty years. Photius died in the year 1430 A.D. A week before his death an angel of God appeared to him and informed him of the exact time of his departure from this world.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY THEOTOKOS [THE HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD]

To the All-pure Virgin, we prostrate
And through her, the mercy of God we seek.
In eternal glory, she glistens
And to the Lord Christ, for us prays.
Full of power are Her prayers.
Precious are the prayers of the Mother to the Son.
All who Her Son created She loves,
As a taper burns, with prayers for all
And reaches everywhere, for petitions to hear,
Everywhere to comfort, where sorrow poisons.
To the sick, Her name is sweetness,
To the demons, Her name is a scourge.
Where they are invoked, His Cross and Mary,
There, courage and new strength, they give.
To the All-pure Virgin, we prostrate
And through Her, the mercy of God we seek.

REFLECTION

Every device of which man boasts as an invention of his mind is revealed by Divine Providence and every invented device has its two-fold significance one physical, the other spiritual. Even the clock is a wonderful device but it was not invented merely to tell us the time of day and night but also to remind us of death. This is its spiritual significance. When the small hand completes its rounds of seconds and minutes then the large hand arrives at the ordered hour and the clock strikes. So will the clock of our life strike when the days, months and years of our life are numbered. That is why St. Tikhon of Zadonsk counsels every Christian to reflect:

1. How the time of our life continually passes;
2. How it is impossible to bring back time that is past;
3. How the past and future times are not in our control but only that time in which we are now living;
4. How the end of our life is unknown;
5. How we must be prepared for death every day, every hour and every minute;
6. How because of that we must always be in the state of continual repentance;
7. How we must be repentant in every hour and spiritually disposed as we would wish to be at the hour of our death.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the burning bush on Horeb (**Exodus 3**):

1. How, the bush was completely engulfed by flame and was not consumed;
2. How also, the All-pure Virgin bearing within herself the Divine Fire, the Lord God-Man, and was not consumed by Him;
3. How, the Grace of the Divine Fire, also rejuvenates, heals and illuminates even my sinful soul.

HOMILY

-About the trial of our faith-

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearance of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

Brethren, our faith is tried more often than is the reed rocked by the winds. Trials are like the winds: a weak faith they will uproot and a strong faith will be strengthened even more. Trials are also like the flame in which straw is burned and gold is purified.

Man's intellectual pursuits and suppositions also try our faith. These are very strong and bitter winds. But we can overcome them if we are willing to adhere to the words of God and if, in opposition to those intellectual pursuits, we are able to emphasize the teachings of the Faith of Christ.

Our faith is further tried by fear and shame: fear of men who persecute the Faith and shame of men who arrogantly despise the Faith. These also are strong winds which we must resist if we wish to remain alive. How will we resist them? By the fear of God which should always be greater in our soul than the fear of men and of shame before the apostles, saints and martyrs who were not ashamed of their faith before emperors, princes and sages of this world.

Our faith is further tried by suffering and misery. This is the fire in which our faith either has to be burned like straw or to be tempered as pure gold. We will resist these trials if we would but remember Christ crucified on the Cross for us and so many thousands of martyrs for the Faith who, in their patience, conquered all and emerged from the flames as gold and who for centuries glow among the angels and among men.

Our faith is also tried by death, the death of our relatives and friends and the death of mankind in general. This is the bitter fire in which the faith of many have been burned. Is death the end of everything? It is not, but rather believe that it is the beginning of everything; it is the beginning of a new and just life. Believe in the Resurrection of Christ, believe in life beyond the grave and believe in the general resurrection and the Dreadful Judgment.

O Good Lord, strengthen the faith in us and have mercy on us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR HYACINTHUS

Hyacinthus was a young man and a courtier at the court of Emperor Trajan. Secretly, he was a Christian. At one time when Emperor Trajan and his entire court solemnly offered sacrifices to the idols, Hyacinthus refrained from this abominable solemnity. For that he was accused and brought before the emperor to be judged. The emperor counseled him to deny Christ and to offer sacrifices to the idols. Hyacinthus remained as firm as a diamond and said to the emperor: "I am a Christian and I honor Christ. Him I worship and to Him alone do I offer myself as a living sacrifice." Beaten, spat upon and scraped, this holy martyr was thrown into prison. By order of the emperor, he was given nothing to eat except the sacrifices offered before the idols. Hyacinthus refused to partake of them and after eight days died in prison. The prison guards saw two radiant angels in the prison: one angel covering the body of the martyred Hyacinthus with his radiant vesture and the other angel placing a glorious wreath on his head. The entire prison was illuminated and aromatic. The youthful Hyacinthus honorably suffered and was crowned with eternal glory in the year 108 A.D.

2. SAINT ANATOLIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

At first, Anatolius was a presbyter in the Church at Alexandria and following the death of Patriarch Flavian, he was elevated to the patriarchal throne of Constantinople in the year 449 A.D. During his reign, the throne of Constantinople was recognized as equal to the throne of Rome by the Ecumenical Council held at Chalcedon in 451 A.D. He struggled greatly for the purity of the Orthodox Faith, suffered much at the hands of the heretics and finally was slain by them in the year 458 A.D. during the reign of Pope Leo the Great. Anatolius governed the church for nearly nine years and took up his habitation among the holy hierarchs in the Kingdom of God.

3. THE VENERABLE ALEXANDER [AKIMETES]

Alexander was born in Asia, educated in Constantinople and after the completion of his schooling he devoted himself to military service and attained the rank of an officer. Reading Holy Scripture, he came across the words of the Savior: **"If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven. Afterward come back and follow me"** (St. Matthew 19:21). These words had such an effect on Alexander that he immediately sold and distributed all that he had and withdrew into the wilderness. After many mortifications and labors in purifying himself, he established a monastery of the Sleepless Ones with a special constitution according to this rule: the divine services [offices] were carried on night and day without interruption in his community. The brotherhood was divided into twenty-four relays [cursus]. Each relay knew their hour of the day and night and went to church to continue the reading and singing of the preceding relay. Carrying nothing with him, Alexander traveled much throughout the eastern regions enlightening men with the Faith of Christ. Alexander disputed with heretics, worked miracles by the Grace of God, grew old serving the Lord and finally ended his earthly life in Constantinople in the year 430 A.D. where his relics manifested miraculous power and glory through which God glorifies His holy servants.

4. VENERABLE ISAIAH, THE RECLUSE [ANCHORITE]

Isaiah lived a life of asceticism in the Egyptian Scete during the fifth and sixth centuries. He is mentioned in the book of Saints Barsanuphius and John (Reply 249 and others) as a man possessing exceptional sanctity. He wrote many instructions for monks and anchorites. Of his works, very little remains and much was destroyed by the Muslims. St. Isaiah said: "The mind, before it awakens from the sleep of slothfulness, resides with the demons." "The crown of all good works consists in this: that a man place all his hope in God; that he finds recourse in Him once and for all with his heart and strength; that he be filled with compassion for all and weep before God, imploring His help and mercy." What is the sign to man that a certain sin is forgiven? "The sign that a sin is forgiven is that the sin does not generate any activity in your heart and that you have forgotten it to such a degree that in conversation about a similar sin you do not feel any inclination toward that sin but rather consider it something totally foreign to you. That is the sign that you are completely pardoned." In vain are prayer and mortification to a man who conceals within himself malice toward his neighbor and the desire for revenge. "Watch with all your strength that you do not speak one thing with your mouth and have something else in your heart." "The crown of good works is love; the crown of passions is the justification of one's sins."

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ALEXANDER [AKIMETES]

Venerable Alexander, saint of God,
Established the temple of the "Sleepless Ones"; holy monastery,
That in it, the Lord be glorified, hymned and magnified;
Concerning this holy monastery, the story is still related.
But brethren, even our heart the community of heaven is,
It is necessary in your heart to glorify the Living God,
In the heart, let sleepless prayer be counted,
As a flame, let unquenchable love stand,
With Grace let the Holy Spirit warm our hearts,
Let Christ, His words throughout our heart sow,
Let the angels in that temple keep vigil day and night
Farther from us, farther from them, the furious ones let them hide.
Let the Holy Virgin emit with myrrh in that temple,
Together with Her, let the apostles and all of the saints throughout,
And all the chosen ones of God; glorious martyrs,
And all the virgins for the sake of Christ and all the hermits.
In the hearts, let the Liturgy be celebrated thusly
And sleeplessly magnify the wisdom of God.

REFLECTION

Love is all-powerful. It can, among other things, ease the judgment of the souls of deceased sinners. The Orthodox Church confirms this resolutely and continues to offer prayers and performs corporal works of mercy for the deceased. Abundantly rich in every spiritual experience, the Church knows that prayers and works of mercy for the deceased helps those in the other world. Before her death, St. Athanasia the Abbess (April 12) made the sisterhood promise that for forty days after her death they would prepare a table for the poor and needy. The sisterhood carried out her command for only ten days and then ceased. The saint then appeared in the company of two angels and said to the sisters: "Why have you transgressed my commandment? Know, that through works of mercy and the prayers of the priest for the souls of the deceased in the course of forty days, invokes God's mercy. If the souls of the departed are sinful they, through this, receive forgiveness of sins from God and if they are not sinful then the corporal works of mercy performed for them serve to the salvation of the benefactor himself." Naturally, works of mercy and prayer are thought of here in connection with great love toward the departed souls. Such works of mercy and prayer, in truth, do help.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous transformation of the rod into a serpent and, again, the serpent into the rod (**Exodus 4**):

1. How the Lord Who created the serpent and the rod from dust, by His own power and for the sake of higher goals, can transform the dead into the living and the living into the dead;
2. How the Lord can, according to my faith and prayer, return my soul, withered and deadened by sin, to life.

HOMILY

-About the joy of faith in Christ-

"Although you have never seen Him, you love Him, and without seeing you now believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible joy touched with glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

These are the words of the Holy Apostle Peter. He saw the Lord and loved Him. He looked at the Lord and believed in Him. Precisely because of that, he praises the love of those who have not seen the Lord and the faith of those who have not seen Him with their eyes. Our Lord Himself said: **"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (St. John 20:29)**. Blessed are they who have not seen the Lord as the apostle saw Him, but, nevertheless, they love Him with apostolic love. Blessed are they who have not seen the Lord as the apostle saw Him but, nevertheless, they believe in Him with apostolic faith!

O my brethren, even if we do not see the Lord, we see His works which have enlightened the entire history of mankind from one end to the other and have illumined every created thing under the heavens with a spiritual significance. Even if we do not see the Lord, we see His Holy Church built upon His All-holy and Pure Blood, from countless saints, righteous ones and numerous souls baptized in His Name throughout the ages of ages. Even if we do not see the Lord face to face as the apostles saw Him, we believe that He is among us in the Body and Blood by which we, according to His commandment, communicate and, in communicating, we rejoice with unspeakable joy.

Brethren, the Lord is alive and the Lord is near! That is our unwavering faith and that is the spark of fire which stirs our hearts in a flame of love for the Lord, living and near.

To know that our Lord the Creator, out of love, descended into the earth and appeared as a man for our sake and further know that He was dead and that He appeared alive what stronger foundation does our faith need and what stronger justification for our love?

Brethren, the Lord is alive and near. And even in our day, He is appearing to many righteous souls who serve Him with patience.

O Living Lord, You were dead and are alive enliven in us faith and love until our last breath on earth, that with faith and love, we may be worthy to see You face to face as did Your holy apostles.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT ANDREW, ARCHBISHOP OF CRETE

Andrew was born in Damascus of Christian parents. He was a mute from birth until the age of seven. When his parents brought him to church and he received Holy Communion, he began to speak. So great is the power of the Divine and Holy Communion. At age fourteen, Andrew went to Jerusalem and was tonsured in the Lavra of St. Sabas the Sanctified. By virtue of his understanding and asceticism, he surpassed many of the older monks and was an example to them. After a while, the patriarch took him as his personal secretary. When the Monothelite heresy began to rage the heresy which taught that the Lord Jesus did not possess a human will but only a divine will the Sixth Ecumenical Council convened in Constantinople in the year 681 A.D. during the reign of Constantine IV [Bearded One]. Theodore, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, was unable to attend the council but sent Andrew as his representative who, at that time, was an Archdeacon. At the council, Andrew displayed his wonderful gift of oratory, his zeal for the Faith and rare prudence. Having assisted in strengthening the Orthodox Faith, Andrew returned to his duties in Jerusalem. Later, he was elected and installed as the Archbishop of the Island of Crete. As an archbishop, he was greatly loved by the people. Andrew was very zealous for Orthodoxy and vehemently eradicated all heresies. Through his prayers he worked miracles. By his prayers, he drove the Saracens from the Island of Crete. Andrew wrote many books of instruction, hymns and canons of which the most renowned is the Great Canon to the Birth-giver of God read on Thursday of the Fifth Sunday of the Great Lenten Season. His outward appearance was such that "seeing his face and hearing his words flowing like honey, everyone found pleasure and amended their ways." On one occasion, returning from Constantinople, Andrew foretold his death before he arrived in Crete. And so it happened. When the boat in which he traveled sailed near the island of Mitylene, this beacon of the Church ended his earthly life and with his soul, took up habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in the year 721 A.D.

2. SAINT MARTHA

Martha was the mother of St. Simeon of the Wonderful Mountain (May 24). Dedicated with all her soul to the Faith, she did not think of marriage. When her parents betrothed her to a young man, Martha thought of leaving the home of her parents and to withdrew from the world. But, St. John the Baptist appeared to Martha and counseled her to fulfill the will of her parents and to enter into marriage, which she did. From this marital union, the glorious saint, Simeon of the Wonderful Mountain was born. She had the regular habit of rising at midnight for prayer. With great charity, she helped the needy and misfortunate, visited the poor, the orphaned and attended the sick. A year before her death she saw many angels with candles in their hands and, from them, learned the time of her death. Learning of this, Martha with even greater zeal dedicated herself to prayer and good works. She died peacefully in the year 551 A.D. and was buried in the proximity of her son, Simeon the Stylite. After her death, she appeared many times for the purpose of instructing mankind and for the sake of healing the sick. Recorded as her most significant appearance was the one to the abbot of Simeon's monastery. Following the burial of St. Martha, the abbot placed a votive candle on her grave with the understanding that it should never be extinguished. Then the abbot became ill and the saintly Martha appeared to him and said: "Why do you not burn a votive candle on my grave? Know that I am not in need of the light from your candle since I have been made worthy before God, the Eternal Heavenly Light, but it is needed for you. So when you burn a light on my grave, you entreat me to pray to the Lord for you." It is obvious from this that the goal of our veneration for the saints is to entreat them as those worthier than us to pray to God for us and for our salvation.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

**In His Divine Providence, miraculous is the Lord,
To Andrew, the mute, He gave a clear voice
And the mute, His audible trumpet made
As one time Saul (Paul), the pillar of the Church.
In vain from marriage did holy Martha shun
To the will of God must bow down,
To marriage the Providence of God led Martha
That for God and the world, of a saint to give birth
Whoever himself gives to God, himself he gave to the Best,
And his will, he overcame by God's will
My child, without the Lord, do not plan anything,
That your plans without fruit do not be.
Of life, all the threads and all your desires
In the hands of the Creator Almighty stand.
His are the fields; His are the slopes,
His are the basic elements, the foundations and the threads.
His is the soul; His is the body,
And of everything and its attire, the spirit
In his field with His tools
Whose shall we fulfill, except His will.**

REFLECTION

If your entire life passed smoothly and without worry, then weep for yourself. For the Gospel and the experience of the people, with one accord assert that no one has, without great suffering and pain, left behind any great and beneficial work on earth or was glorified in the heavens. If, however, your earthly sojourn is completely adorned with sweat and tears to attain justice and truth, rejoice and be exceedingly glad for truly great is your reward in the heavens. Do not ever succumb to the insane thought that God has abandoned you. God knows exactly how much one can endure and, according to that, measures the sufferings and pains of everyone. St. Nil Sorsky says: "When even men know how much weight a horse, or a donkey or a camel can carry and, according to that they are loading them according to their strength; when a potter knows how long to leave the clay in the kiln for it to be neither shattered nor over-baked, how could God not know how much temptation a soul can bear to make it ready and fitted for the Kingdom of Heaven?"

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate all the miracles which the Lord performed at the hands of Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: **"And Aaron and Moses went in unto Pharaoh and they did as the Lord had commanded" (Exodus 7:10):**

1. How great and awesome were those miracles;
2. How the heart of pharaoh remained obstinate before all the miracles of God;
3. How even my heart is hard before the countless miracles of God in my heart, in my life and around me and how I need to repent before the end befalls me and eternal punishment reaches me.

HOMILY

-About the salvation of a soul as the end of faith-

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:9).

Brethren, what is the end of faith? The salvation of a soul. What is the goal of faith? The salvation of a soul. What is the fruit of faith? The salvation of a soul. We do not adhere to faith, therefore, for the sake of faith but rather for the salvation of our souls. No one travels for the sake of the road but because of someone or something that awaits him at the end of the road. No one throws a rope into the water in which someone is drowning for the sake of the rope but for the sake of the one drowning. God gave faith to us as a road, the end of which the travelers will receive salvation of their souls. And, as a rope, God extended faith to us who are drowning in the dark waters of sin, ignorance and vice that we, through the help of faith, save our lives.

That is the purpose of faith. Whoever knows the price of a human soul must admit that there is nothing in this world more necessary or more beneficial than faith. A merchant who carries precious stones in an earthen vessel carefully and cautiously protects the vessel, hides it and keeps vigil over it. Is it because of the vessel that the merchant exerts such effort and concern? Not because of the vessel, but because of the precious stones which are in the vessel. Our entire earthly life is like an earthen vessel in which a priceless treasure is hidden. That priceless treasure is our soul. A vessel is cheap but a treasure is valuable. First, one must have faith in the value of a human soul and second, in the future glow and life of the soul in the Kingdom of God; third, in the Living God Who waits for the return of a soul which He Himself gave us and fourth, in the possibility that a soul could be lost in this world. Whosoever has faith in these four things will know how to protect his soul and will further know that the salvation of a soul is the end of his road, the goal of his faith, the fruit of his life, the purpose of his existence on earth and the justification of his sufferings.

We believe for the sake of the salvation of our soul. Whoever has a true faith, must also know that faith is for the sake of the salvation of souls. He who thinks that his faith serves another purpose other than salvation does not have a true faith nor does he know the value of his soul.

O All-good Lord Jesus, You have given us a shining and victorious faith, strengthen and maintain that faith in us that we may stand unashamed before Your judgment with our pure and shining souls.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE ATHANASIUS OF MOUNT ATHOS

Athanasius was born in Trebizond of God-fearing parents. He became orphaned at an early age but, by the Providence of God, a commander took him under his care and brought him to Constantinople to be educated. Because of his meekness and humbleness, he was the favorite of his peers. During the children's games, the children chose one to be an emperor, one a commander and Athanasius as abbot as though it was some kind of foretelling! Having completed his education, Athanasius (who before tonsuring was called Abraham) withdrew into the desert of Maleinos near Athos, the Holy Mountain, where he lived the life of an ascetic as a disciple of the then renowned Michael Maleinos. Desiring a more difficult life of mortification, Athanasius settled on Holy Mt. Athos to live in silence (the life of a silentary). But many who were desirous of a life of asceticism began to gather around him and, therefore, he was compelled to build his famous Lavra [monastery]. In that, he was assisted by the Byzantine emperors: at first, Nicephorus Phocas, who himself thought to withdraw and to become a monk and, after him, John Tzimiskes. Countless temptations befell Athanasius both from demons and from men but he, as a brave soldier of Christ, resisted and conquered all by his immeasurable meekness and continual prayer to the Living God. Filled with the Grace of God, Athanasius was made worthy to see the All-holy Birth-giver of God who miraculously brought forth water from a rock and promised that she would also be the abbess [Ikonomisa, the one in charge of the provisions of the monastery]. In work and in prayer, Athanasius surpassed his brethren and loved all with the love a spiritual father and shepherd. Death came to Athanasius unexpectedly. At one time, he with six other monks, climbed upon a newly built vestibule of the church to inspect the wall which was being constructed and the wall caved in on them and buried them. Thus, this great beacon of monasticism died in the year 980 A.D. Many times following his death Athanasius appeared to his brethren either to comfort them or to reprimand them.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYR, CYPRIAN THE NEW

Cyprian was born in the village of Klitzos in Epirus. Following the death of his good parents, Cyprian went to the Holy Mt. Athos, was tonsured a monk and devoted himself completely to a life of asceticism in a cell near the monastery of Kutlounousiou. He imposed upon himself labor upon labor and mortification upon mortification until he became renown and respected throughout the entire Holy Mountain. Cyprian was still not satisfied with himself. He was tormented by the thought that he could not be saved except through martyrdom for Christ. Therefore, he left the Holy Mountain and arrived in Thessalonica and came before the Pasha of Thessalonica and called upon him to reject the false faith of Muhammad and to accept the true faith of Christ. The Pasha ordered him scourged and driven out. Unsatisfied with such a small suffering for Christ, Cyprian traveled to Constantinople and wrote a letter to the Grand Vezir in which he outlined the falseness of Muhammad and the truthfulness of the Lord Christ. Enraged, the Vezir sent him to Skeik Ul Islamu and he, after having heard all that Cyprian had to say, ordered him beheaded. Cyprian was joyful beyond measure and went to the scaffold as to a wedding feast. Thus, this godly man suffered for Christ on July 5, 1679, and realized his burning desire.

3. THE VENERABLE LAMPADUS

Loving Christ with a fervent love from his early youth, Lampadus withdrew into the wilderness of Irenopolis where he gave himself up to a life of asceticism. Since he overcame all passions and desires of the flesh, his soul was radiant with a heavenly light and an unspeakable peace not of this world. Lampadus was a miracle-worker, both during life and after death. He lived a life of mortification probably in the tenth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TO THE HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD

On Mt. Athos, a Lavra glows,
Wondrous monastery of Athanasius
One thousand years have slid by it
But the spirit and bread did not run out
It was neither lacking in spirit or bread
Nor the glowing vision of God's heaven.
Thus it was written in books of old:
About the Lavra, the Abbess - Ikonomisa worries,
Mount Athos is her state,
The most fortified wall of Orthodoxy;
That mystical Abbess - Ikonomisa
Is it not the All-pure Birth-giver of God?
The Lavra, She upholds and Iveron feeds,
And Hilendar protects and Rusikon defends,
Karakallou and Zograph, Simonpeter,
And Pandocrator, all She protects
Those fortifications, to Her citizens they belong
But peace and defense to all She is.

REFLECTION

By striking the rod, how did Moses bring forth water from the rock? How did God send down manna from heaven and feed the people of Israel in the wilderness? Thus, ask all those who have a very weak conception of the might of the Omnipotent God. And still they are perplexed why such miracles do not take place again in order that all peoples may believe in God. But the Israelites, with their own eyes, witnessed countless miracles of God and still they did not believe. Meanwhile, God repeats the old great miracles wherever and whenever it is needed. One time, when a famine ensued in the Lavra of Athanasius, all of the brethren dispersed wherever. Dejected, Athanasius began to move about and to seek out another place. A lady on the road asked him: "Where are you going?" "Who are you?" Athanasius asked bewildered because he sees a woman on the Holy Mountain, where access to women is not permitted. "I am she to whom you have dedicated your community. I am the Mother of your Lord." Athanasius said: "I am afraid to trust you, for even demons can manifest themselves into angels of light. With what shall you prove to me the truthfulness of your words?" Then the Holy Birth-giver of God said to him: "Strike your rod upon this rock and you will know who I am that speaks to you. Know that I am always remaining the Abbess - Ikonomisa of your Lavra." Athanasius then struck the rock with his rod. At that moment the rock shook and cracked as thunder and water gushed forth from the shattered rock. Frightened, Athanasius turned so as to prostrate before the Holy All-pure One but She had already vanished. He returned to his Lavra and even to his greater amazement, found all the barns (storehouses) overflowing with wheat. Here, then, is a repetition of the great miracles by which the miracles of old are confirmed and by which the faithful are strengthened in the Faith.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous crossing of the Israelites across the Red Sea (**Exodus 14**):

1. How Moses waved the rod according to the command of God and the sea was divided and the people of God passed over on the dry bottom of the sea;
2. How the Egyptians pursued the Israelites along the same path but Moses waved the rod and the sea came together;
3. How this teaches me that whatever He wills, all is possible with God and that He saves His faithful servant from the greatest danger and punishes the unfaithful.

HOMILY

-About the sobriety of the mind-

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

Brethren, the mind is the guide of the soul and the advisor to the soul. God gave only a soul to the animals [an irrational soul] that is why He did not give them freedom but guides them with His mind. God gave man a soul [a rational soul] and mind and with the mind, freedom. The mind and freedom are inseparable. From this, are all the empty tales of certain philosophers concerning how man truly has a mind but does not possess freedom. For it is clear from daily experience that freedom is an inseparable companion of the mind. But, as man does not possess a perfect mind, so he does not possess perfect freedom but, nevertheless, stands under the direction and guidance of God. God alone has a perfect mind and perfect freedom. We, therefore, are only the "image and likeness" of the mind and the freedom of God. We possess a sufficient enough mind that we may know the will of God and enough freedom that we can decide to fulfill the will of God. When the mind loses the absolute guiding power over the soul then, what follows in the soul is many guiding principles which result in the confusion, chaos and destruction.

What do the words of the apostle mean: "gird up the loins of your mind and be sober" They mean: do not allow your mind to fantasize but concentrate the mind on the contemplation on the law of God. They also mean: do not allow your mind to abuse the God-given freedom of plunging the soul into the slavery of the flesh, the world and the devil but nail the mind to Christ as to a cross so that your soul may resurrect in Christ. Further they mean: close your mind off from all self-willed imaginations from which it becomes intoxicated and falls into the booty of the devil and keep the mind girded in the narrowness of your heart where it will become sober through prayer and become pure through tears. Briefly, it means: exercise your mind not to abuse your freedom by ridiculing the Living and Merciful God and deadening the soul by passions.

O Lord Jesus, the Mind of God and the Wisdom of God, help us to gird our mind so that it would think only of what is from You and that what is Yours, so that the mind would lead our soul soberly to salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE SISOES THE GREAT

Sisoës was an Egyptian by birth and a disciple of St. Anthony. Following the death of his great teacher, St. Sisoës settled on a mountain in the wilderness called St. Anthony's Mount where Anthony lived a life of asceticism earlier. Imposing difficult labors on himself, he humbled himself so much that he became meek and guileless as a lamb. For this God endowed Sisoës with abundant grace so that he was able to heal the sick, drive out unclean spirits and resurrect the dead. Sisoës lived a life of austere mortification in the wilderness for sixty years and was a source of living wisdom for all monks and laymen who came to him for counsel and advice. Before death, his face shone as the sun. The monks stood around him and were astonished at this manifestation. When this saint gave up his soul, the entire room was filled with a sweet-smelling savor. Sisoës died in extreme old age in the year 429 A.D. St. Sisoës taught the monks: "Regardless in what way temptation comes to man, a man should give himself to the will of God and to recognize that temptation occurred because of his sins. If something good happens, it should be said that it happened according to God's Providence." One monk asked Sisoës: "How can I please God and be saved?" The saint answered: "If you wish to please God, withdraw from the world, separate yourself from the earth, put aside creation, draw near to the Creator, unite yourself to God with prayers and tears and then you will find rest in this time and in the future." The monk asked Sisoës: "How can I attain humility?" The saint replied: "When a person learns to recognize every man as being better than himself, with that he attains humility." Ammon complained to Sisoës that he could not memorize the wise sayings that he read in order to repeat them in conversation with men. The saint replied to him: "That is not necessary. It is necessary to attain purity of mind and speak from that purity placing your hope in God."

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS MARINUS [MARIUS] AND MARTHA WITH THEIR SONS AUDIFAX AND ABACHUM [HABAKUK], VALENTINE THE PRESBYTER, CYRINUS, ASTYRIUS [ASTERIUS] AND MANY OTHERS

They all suffered during the reign of Emperor Claudius Flavius in Rome in the year 269 A.D. Marinus and Martha were wealthy people from Persia. They sold all their property in Persia and, with their sons, came to Rome in order to venerate the sacred relics of the holy apostles and other martyrs. When the emperor asked them why they came from such a distance, leaving their [household] domestic gods to seek dead men in Rome, they responded: "We are servants of Christ and we came to venerate the holy apostles whose immortal souls live with God, that they may be our intercessors before Christ our God." Cyrinus was thrown into the Tiber river from which his body was removed by Marinus and Martha who honorably buried it. Valentine the priest was handed over to Commander Astyrius so that he would counsel him to deny Christ. But, Valentine, through prayer healed the daughter of Astyrius who, had been blind for two years. Following that, Valentine baptized Astyrius and his entire family. All of them, in various ways underwent suffering and death for Christ the Lord Who received them into His Immortal Kingdom to rejoice eternally.

3. THE FINDING OF THE RELICS OF SAINT JULIANA THE VIRGIN

Juliana was the daughter of the Prince of Olshansk. She died about the year 1540 A.D. as a virgin of about sixteen years of age. Two hundred years after her death, some men who were digging a new grave alongside the great church in the monastery of the Caves in Kiev found the relics of this holy virgin completely intact and uncorrupt as though she had just fallen asleep. Many miracles occurred from these relics and Juliana herself appeared many times to certain individuals. The renowned Peter Mogila had one such vision.

4. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR LUCY

Lucy was taken captive by the barbarian Emperor Austius in Campania. The emperor wanted Lucy to live with him [as his concubine] but she protested. The emperor left her in peace so that she could live a life of asceticism. She even converted the emperor to the Faith because, through her prayer, he gained a victory in battle. In the end she, together with the emperor, were martyred for Christ in Rome about the year 300 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ASTYRIUS [ASTERIUS]

Astyrius, a slave was to the idol Zeus
And Valentine the presbyter, a slave to Astyrius
"Who is Christ?" the aristocrat of Valentine asked.
About Christ the Son of God, you are asking me?
"To the world, He is the Light; to men He is the light,
To everything and to all good beings, He is the Light.
Pure Light He is; with darkness there is no mixture,
In the darkness He descended and light He brought.
The living He illumined with works and teaching,
The dead He illumined with the glowing resurrection.
By radiance, the entirety of Hades was destroyed,
And with love, the human race became inflamed,
Inflamed by love, enlightened with wisdom,
With God reconciled and with mercy smiled.
That is Christ the Lord for Whom I am dying,
And in Whose Name, the idols I trample.
That Valentine said and, to that Astyrius answered:
"All those words, as pure gold I receive:
My blind daughter, if you heal
I, Valentine, your Faith will embrace."
Hearing this the priest on his knees knelt
To the Most High, a fervent prayer said.
And on the eyes of the maiden, his hands he placed.
The maiden, her sight restored! Astyrius leaped
Because of this awesome miracle. And acknowledged Christ
And for Christ his life, a martyr's life gave.

REFLECTION

From where do we know that there is life after death? We know from Christ the Lord: on the basis of His words, His resurrection and by His many appearances after death. Philosophers, who recognize life after death, recognize it on the basis of their thinking but we recognize it on the basis of experience, especially the experience of holy men who were not capable of falsehoods nor could they proclaim falsehoods. When Sisoës lay on his deathbed, his face was very radiant. The monks, his disciples, stood around him. Then St. Sisoës gazed around and said: "Behold, here came Abba Anthony!" he remained silent for a while and then, again said: "Behold, here came the prophets!" In that moment, his face glowed even more and he said: "Behold, here came the apostles!" Following that he said: "Behold, here came the angels to take away my soul!" Finally, his face shown as the sun and all were overcome by great fear and the elder said: "Behold, here comes the Lord, look at Him all of you." Behold, He speaks: "Bring to me the chosen vessel from the wilderness." After that, the saint gave up his soul. How many more similar visions were there and that from the most reliable witnesses!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous falling of manna from heaven for the feeding of the people in the wilderness (**Exodus 16**):

1. How throughout forty years, the Lord gave the Israelites in the wilderness manna from heaven; a heavenly food, sweet as honey;
2. How that manna from heaven was a prototype of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life descending from heaven, Himself to feed the spiritually hungry men in the wilderness of paganism;
3. How nothing can satisfy my hungry soul except the Living Christ the Lord, sweeter than honey.

HOMILY

-About the terrible prince of redemption-

"For as much as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1: 18-19).

Brethren, could anyone have purchased a cure against sin with silver and gold? Never and by no one.

Brethren, could anyone forge arms against the devil with silver and gold? Never and by no one.

Brethren, could anyone have been redeemed from death with the help of silver and gold? Never and by no one.

Something far more precious than silver and gold was needed to be a cure, a weapon and ransom. The Precious Blood of the Son of God was needed to be applied on the sinful wounds in order to be healed. The Precious Blood of the Son of God was needed in order to be directed against evil spirits and by its power to burn them and to drive them away from man. The Precious Blood of the Son of God was needed to sprinkle the earthly graves in order to subdue death and to raise the dead.

"As a Lamb without blemish and without spot," the Lamb of God was slain for us to pull us out from the three-fold jawbone of the beast. A pitiful but life-giving banquet. God arranged this costly banquet to manifest freedom to man. Sin, the devil and death charged with all their might against the innocent and All-pure "Lamb of God without blemish and without spot." They killed Him but they were poisoned by His blood. This blood was shed in order to be poison for them but for mankind, life and salvation.

O my brethren, if you do not know how consuming sin is and how wicked the devil is and how bitter death is, judge this by the greatness of redemption by which we are redeemed from their bondage. The Precious Blood of Christ, that is our deliverance from bondage! Remember, brethren, that if we are again willing, by recklessness and evil to offer ourselves up to that terrible three-fold bondage, there is not anyone on earth or in heaven who could give a ransom for us. For the precious ransom is one and it was given once and for ever.

O merciful Lord, strengthen us so that we may be sustained in freedom which You have gifted to us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT FEMALE MARTYR DOMINICA [NEDELJA-KIRIAKI]

During the reign of the adversaries of Christ, Emperor Diocletian and his son-in-law Maximian, there lived in Anatolia two pious and elderly souls, Dorotheus and Eusebia. They were devout Christians, wealthy but childless. Unceasing in prayer they obtained a child from God, this holy Dominica. From her childhood, Dominica consecrated herself to God restraining from everything that unruly children do. When she matured, beautiful in body and soul, many suitors came to ask for her hand in marriage but she refused them all saying that she betrothed herself to Christ the Lord and that she desires nothing more than to die as a virgin. One of the rejected suitors denounced Dominica and her parents to Emperor Diocletian as being Christians. The emperor ordered that Dominica's parents be tortured and after torturing them banished them to the town of Melitene where they died enduring much suffering for Christ. Diocletian, however, sent Dominica to Maximian to stand trial. As Dominica confirmed her faith in Christ before Maximian, he ordered that she be placed on the ground and flogged with oxen whips. After that, the emperor handed her over to the commanders, at first Hilarion and then, after his death, to Apollonius. Both of them tortured Dominica in a beastly manner in all possible ways but all was in vain. When St. Dominica lay in the prison cell, completely covered with wounds, Christ the Lord appeared to her, healed her and said: "Dominica, do not be afraid of torture, My grace is with you." And truly, the Grace of Christ saved this martyr both from fire and from wild beasts from which the godless judges thought that she would certainly meet death. Seeing the miraculous salvation of Dominica from so many deaths, many pagans believed in Christ. However, they were all beheaded. Dominica said to Apollonius: "In no manner can you turn me away from my Faith. If you throw me into the fire, I have an example in the Three Youths [Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego]; if you throw me before wild beasts, I have an example in Daniel the Prophet; if you toss me into the sea, I have an example in Jonah the Prophet; if you give me over to the sword, I will remember the honorable Forerunner [John the Baptist]; life for me is to die for Christ." Then Apollonius ordered that Dominica be beheaded. Dominica knelt on her knees, raised her hands to heaven and prayed to God that He would have mercy and save all those who would celebrate her memory and to give rest to her soul together with the souls of her parents. Upon completing her prayer, she rendered her soul to God before the sword was lowered on her head. Dominica suffered honorably and was received into eternal joy in the year 289 A.D. in Nicomedia.

2. THE VENERABLE THOMAS OF MALEA

At first, Thomas was a commander distinguished by his bravery and wealth. He was a very massive individual and instilled fear in his enemies. But when Thomas fell in love with Christ more than the world and everything in the world, he left all and withdrew into the wilderness where he was tonsured a monk and gave himself up to a life of strict asceticism. St. Elijah the Prophet appeared to him and led him to a mountain called Malea next to Athos, the Holy Mountain. There he lived alone and isolated only with God, in prayer day and night. Even though he concealed himself from the world, he could not remain hidden. Upon learning about the sanctity of his life, men began to come to him and to bring their sick. St. Thomas cured men from every infirmity and affliction. When he presented himself to the Lord in the tenth century, his relics continued to help all those who approached them with faith.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYRS EPITECTUS AND ASTIUS

Astius, the only son of his parents, was persuaded to love the Faith of Christ by Epitectus the priest who baptized him and tonsured him a monk. After that they moved from somewhere in the eastern regions of Scythia and settled in the Scythian town of Almirida (now Ramzina) on the mouth of the Danube on the Black Sea. They were tortured and beheaded for the Faith of Christ about 290 A.D. After their deaths, they both appeared in great radiance to the parents of St. Astius, Alexander and Marcellina, who were converted to Christ and who were baptized by Bishop Evangelus who himself, then was beheaded for Christ: "Evangelus, another angel" as is sung about him.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT DOMINICA [NEDELJA-KIRIAKI]

The only child, Saint Dominica,
Her parents, for the Faith died
Parents; God's saints.
The orphan, Saint Dominica,
What she possessed, to the poor she gave,
Only body and garment remained
And that, she sacrificed for Christ,
Dominica, as the dew, pure,
To be bribed by anything, did not allow,
To be lured by anyone, did not allow
Neither to be frightened by anything did allow.
But to suffering as to a wedding goes
Severe sufferings and deep wounds,
But sweet is the Name of Jesus!
Bitter pains, harsh humiliations,
But sweet is eternal reigning!
Her entire body, with red blood,
But the joy of Paradise is sweet!
O Dominica, God's chosen one,
And for Christ, wonderful martyr,
With a sword from the earth you were driven,
Wedded in glory, in heaven you were
Teach us the Faith to honor,
Encourage us, our life to give for her [the Faith],
By your prayers, help us
Wonderful candle, amidst the candles of Paradise.

REFLECTION

The example of St. Dominica, the beautiful virgin, and the example of St. Astius the rich young man, both of whom submitted themselves to torture and death for Christ the Lord, leads us to contemplate that there is nothing comparable in history to the power of Christ by whose help young men conquer themselves and through that, everything else. To obtain victory over one's self is the greatest victory. Such victors, the Church numbers by the thousands and many thousands. In writing about virginity, St. Cyprian says: "To conquer pleasure is the greatest pleasure, neither is there a greater victory than the victory over one's desires. He who conquered one opponent, proved himself stronger than somebody else but he who conquered passion proved himself stronger than himself. Every evil is easier to conquer than a pleasure. For all other evils are repulsive while the pleasure of evil is attractive. He who frees himself from desires, frees himself from fear for, because of desires, fear proceeds."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous bringing forth of water from the rock in Horeb (**Exodus 17**):

1. How the thirsty Israelites doubted that God is among them and murmured against Moses;
2. How, by God's command Moses struck the rock with his rod and water flowed from the rock;
3. How even my heart has become as hard as stone because of doubt and how brooks of tears begin to flow when the grace of faith touches it.

HOMILY

-About the [sincere and pure] milk of the word-

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere [pure] milk of the word, that you may grow thereby: If so be, you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2: 2-3).

"As newborn babes," this is how the great apostle regards Christians. Baptism is a new birth and man counts a new life from baptism. The spiritually new born must be fed with mild food the same as the physically new born. What kind of food does the apostle recommend for Christians? "The sincere and pure milk of the word." The physical child is fed with the milk of insincerity, which is only the image of the "pure [sincere] milk of the word" by which a spiritual child needs to be fed. What then is this sincere and pure milk with which Christians should be fed? The apostle himself answers this when he says: "for you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Therefore, that is the Lord Jesus Himself, Living and Life-giving. Christ's words are the sincere and pure milk. Brethren, blessed are you if you nourish your souls with the words of Christ, as sweet milk, for your souls will expand and be blessed and you will be prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Christ's miracles are the sincere and pure milk. Brethren, blessed are you if you nourish your souls with this sweet milk, for you will be similar to the angels who sing the praises of the miracles of God day and night.

The Body and Blood of Christ are the sincere and pure milk. Brethren, blessed are you if you nourish your souls with this sweet milk, for you will become members of the Living and Immortal Body of Christ in the heavens.

Christ's resurrected victory over death is the sincere and pure milk. Brethren, blessed are you if you nourish your souls with this sweet milk, for you will, while yet in this life, walk as victors and in the life to come stand at the right side of Christ the Victor.

Brethren, the whole of Christ is the sincere and pure milk. Let us be eager for this milk above all else that we may grow to salvation. This is the only nourishment for salvation. All else is for decay and the grave.

O Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, You Who are the sincere and pure milk, nourish us with Yourself as You did nourish Your holy apostles so that we may also grow sufficiently to salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR SAINT PROCOPIUS

Procopius was born in Jerusalem of a father who was a Christian and a mother who was a pagan. At first, his name was Neanias. Following the death of his father, the mother raised her son completely in the spirit of Roman idolatry. When Neanias matured, Emperor Diocletian saw him and, at once, took a liking to him and brought him to his palace for military service. When this nefarious emperor began to persecute Christians, he ordered Neanias to go to Alexandria with a garrison of soldiers and there to exterminate the Christians. But, on the road, something happened to Neanias similar to that which happened to Saul [Paul]. In the third hour of the night there was a strong earthquake and, at that moment, the Lord appeared to him and a voice was heard: "Neanias, where are you going and against whom are you rising up?" In great fear, Neanias asked: "Who are You Lord? I am unable to recognize You." At that moment, a glowing cross as if of crystal appeared in the air and from the cross there came a voice saying: "I am Jesus, the crucified Son of God." And further, the Lord said to him: "By this sign that you saw, conquer your enemies and My peace will be with you." That experience completely turned him around and changed the life of Commander Neanias. He issued an order to make the same kind of cross which he saw and instead of going against the Christians he, with his soldiers, turned against the Agarians who were attacking Jerusalem. He entered Jerusalem as a victor and declared to his mother that he is a Christian. Being brought before the court, Neanias removed his commander's belt and sword and tossed them before the judge thereby showing that he is only a soldier of Christ the King. After great tortures he was cast into prison where the Lord Christ, again, appeared to him, baptized him and gave him the name Procopius. One day twelve women appeared before his prison window and said to him: "We too are the servants of Christ." Accused of this they were thrown into the same prison where St. Procopius taught them the Faith of Christ and particularly about how they will receive the martyr's wreath. For that reason in the marriage ritual of the betrothed, St. Procopius is mentioned along with the God-crowned Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena. After this, those twelve women were brutally tortured. Witnessing their suffering and bravery, the mother of Procopius also believed in Christ and all thirteen were slain. When St. Procopius was led to the scaffold, he raised his hands toward the east and prayed to God for all the poor and misfortunate, orphans and widows and especially for the Holy Church that it may grow and spread and that Orthodoxy shine to the end of time. And to Procopius there was a reply from heaven that his prayers were heard after which he joyfully laid his head under the sword and went to his Lord in eternal joy. St. Procopius honorably suffered in Caesarea in Palestine and was crowned with the glorious wreath of immortality on July 8, 303 A.D.

2. SAINT PROCOPIUS, FOOL FOR CHRIST

Procopius was a miracle-worker of Ustiug who died in the year 1303 A.D. Procopius was of Varangian (Norse) descent and a merchant by profession. Coming to Novgorod on business, he was awed by the beauty of Orthodoxy and embraced the Orthodox Faith. Desiring to be a perfect Christian he distributed his estate to the poor and began to practice all the other virtues. He pretended insanity so that men would not praise him and discerned the hearts and destinies of men as well as natural events which, afterwards, indeed occurred. By his tearful prayer before the icon of the Birth-giver of God, Procopius averted a terrible hailstorm over the town of Ustiug and thus brought the sinful town to repentance. His body was found dead on the street completely covered with snow. A church was built over his miracle-working relics.

3. VENERABLE THEOPHILUS THE MYRRH-EMITTING [MIROTOCIVI]

Theophilus was born in Macedonia in the village of Ziki. He was a very educated man and a great ascetic. By order of Patriarch Niphon of Constantinople, he traveled to Alexandria to inquire whether it is true or not that Patriarch Joachim moved a mountain and that he drank poison without harmful effects being forced to do this by the Jews and Muslims. Convinced of the truthfulness of these miracles, Theophilus returned to Holy Mt. Athos where he lived a life of asceticism, at first in Vatopedi, then in Iveron and finally in the cell of St. Basil near Karyes. They offered the Archbishopric of Thessalonica to this holy man, but he refused. Through profound silence and meditation he succeeded to purify his mind of all passionate thoughts and became a pure vessel of the Holy Spirit in which Christ dwelled. Before his death, he ordered Isaac his disciple not to bury him when he dies but to tie a rope around his legs, drag him and then toss him into the river. With great fear, the disciple carried this out. However, the Divine Providence of God revealed the remains of St. Theophilus and when they translated his body to his cell, it began to emit miraculous myrrh. He entered into rest on July 8, 1548.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PROCOPIUS

**When it is the will of the Omniscient God,
Persecutors become His servants,
Haters, wonderful apostles
Pagans, zealots for the Faith.
By God's will, Saul became Paul
Neanias Saint Procopius
Procopius, against Christ went,
As a Christian, to his mother came.
Tortures prepare and himself received tortures,
All of a sudden, the truth he recognized
Before the Son of God, bowed down,
The earthly king, ceased to serve
To the heavenly King, a servant became.
The King of Heaven to him a gift bestowed
The gift of might, the afflicted to help
As at that time, so it is today:
By Procopius, the afflicted are comforted
For today as one time, he helps.**

REFLECTION

St. Anthony teaches: "Be fearful that you do not become famous because of some work that you do. If they begin to praise you because of your work, do not rejoice in that and do not find satisfaction in that but keep your works in secret as much as you can and do not allow anyone to speak about them." How much more peace and joy would there be among men on earth if a part of mankind would take these holy words to heart! Even though St. Theophilus lived as a simple monk secluded on Holy Mt. Athos, he was famous in all the patriarchates of the east, as much for his learning as for his good works and ascetical life of mortification. It happened at one time that Theoleptus, the Patriarch of Constantinople, visited Thessalonica. At that time, the arch-episcopal throne of Thessalonica was vacant. The Christians of Thessalonica unanimously implored the patriarch to appoint Theophilus as their archbishop. The patriarch, a compatriot and friend of Theophilus, wrote a personal letter to him in which he invited him to accept the arch-episcopal throne. Fearing the glory of men and not being able to refuse the patriarch, Theophilus immediately received the "great angelic habit" [The Great Schema] and informed the patriarch of this adding: "If God be willing, we will see each other in the Kingdom of Heaven." Such were the spiritual giants, whom the Church calls saints, afraid of vanity and the glory of mankind.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous changing of bitter water into sweet water (**Exodus 15**):

1. How the thirsty Israelites in Marah came upon bitter water and were unable to drink it and the people began to murmur against Moses;
2. How God commanded Moses to place wood in the water and the water became sweet;
3. How this wood foreshadowed the Cross of Christ by which the bitterness of our life is transformed into sweetness;
4. How my entire being is but bitter water until I bring Christ Crucified into myself.

HOMILY

-About the Living Stone-

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious, You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 4-5).

Brethren, what does this stone signify if not stability? Brethren, what does the stone teach us, if not stability? The living stone signifies immortality. The apostle calls Christ the Lord the Living Stone because He is immortal and the giver of immortality. The apostle even calls Christians living stones as partakers of the immortality of Christ.

Brethren, what do unbelievers think concerning what happens to man at the end of time? They think that, in the end, the same thing happens to man as to a stone: man dies, becomes senseless and is transformed into dust. But a stone is already dead, senseless and, under certain conditions, is transformed into dust. So, both the unbelievers and the believers compare man with a stone; the unbelievers because of the deadness and the senselessness of the stone and the believers because of the durability and the stability of the stone. For the first [unbelievers], the stone is the symbol of death and for the other[unbelievers], the stone is the symbol of immortality.

In truth, without Christ, mankind has been and is always as a dead stone. But Christ is like a living stone. Adhere to Him only and you will become as living stones. In building a home, the builder chooses only those stones, which are chiseled out and prepared to easily lay along side the other stones in the wall. The builder rejects the unchiseled, the unprepared, the unpolished and the fragile stones. Building a home, or a temple of His Immortal Kingdom, Christ chooses men as the builder chooses stones, with one characteristic, namely alive, spiritually alive. The Lord rejects spiritually dead men as a rotten building and accepts only those who are alive, who resemble Him and who fall in place along side other living stones and they [the other living stones] are angels, prophets, apostles and saints in general. Brethren, let us endeavor to be a holy material for a holy house of the Kingdom of Christ which He builds day and night that He, by the end of time, finishes it completely.

O Lord Jesus, the builder of the Kingdom of Heaven, enliven us with Your Holy Spirit and build us also as living stones in the home of Your eternal glory.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR PANCRATIUS [PANCRAS] THE BISHOP OF TAORMINA

This saint was born in Antioch during the time when the Lord Jesus Christ walked as a man among men on earth. Hearing about the miracles of Christ, the parents of Pancratius desired to see the Lord, the miracle-worker. Together with Pancratius, they traveled to Jerusalem where they saw Jesus, heard His words and witnessed His miracles. It was in Jerusalem that Pancratius became acquainted with the Apostle Peter. After the Ascension of the Lord, both parents and Pancratius were baptized in Antioch. Pancratius withdrew to a cave in Pontus where the Apostle Peter found him and in agreement with the Apostle Paul he was appointed as the Bishop of Taormina in Sicily. In Taormina, St. Pancratius worked many miracles, destroyed the idols, baptized the unbaptized, strengthened the baptized and governed well the Church of God. A heathen commander by the name of Aquilinus heard that the entire city of Taormina became Christian and set out with an entire army against this city in order to destroy it. St. Pancratius encouraged the faithful not to be afraid and he, alone, with the clergy went outside the city carrying in his hands the invincible weapon, the Honorable Cross. When the army approached the city, darkness befell them and the soldiers were overcome with great fear. A great confusion then began among them and the attackers turned against one another and pierced and slaughtered each other with their swords. Thus Pancratius, the chosen one of God, saved the city and his flock by the power of his prayer before the Lord. In the end, Pancratius was stoned to death by envious and evil heathens and found rest in the Lord. His holy relics repose in Rome.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR CYRIL, BISHOP OF GORTINA IN CRETE

As an eighty-four year old man, Cyril suffered for Christ during the reign of Decius. He was thrown into fire but was saved by the Providence of God. Then the judge issued the following sentence: "Cyril, who was delivered from the fire, just judgment cannot tolerate him among the living, therefore, I am ordering him to be slain by the sword." With joy did the holy elder place his head under the sword and was beheaded to live eternally in the Kingdom of Christ.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYRS PATERMUTHIUS AND COPRES

Emperor Julian the Apostate tortured Paternuthius and Copres. Paternuthius was seventy-five years old and Copres was forty-five years old. The emperor succeeded in turning Copres away from the Faith of Christ and persuaded him to embrace the idols. The apostate Copres cried out: "I am Julian's, not Christ's." But when the aged Paternuthius rebuked him and reminded him of eternal torments, Copres came to his senses and cried out before the emperor: "I am Christ's and not Julian's." Both were beheaded. Also beheaded with them was Alexander, one of the emperor's soldiers who, witnessing their bravery in suffering, became a Christian. They honorably suffered for Christ and to Christ they went in the year 361 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLES PATERMUTHIUS AND COPRES

Even though they bear the same names, they are different than those mentioned above. At first, Paternuthius was the leader of a band of robbers but after a miraculous vision converted to the True Faith and was tonsured a monk. Namely, he had climbed upon the roof of the home of a godly woman in order to enter the house and pillage it. However, sleep overcame him and, in a dream, he saw someone who warned him not to commit evil and to repent. Not only was Paternuthius baptized but he was also tonsured a monk. Both Paternuthius and Copres were great miracle-workers. By the grace of God, they healed people from all pain and affliction, guided sinners on the true path and discerned the future. A sinner, laying on his deathbed, implored Paternuthius that his life be prolonged in order that he may repent. Following the prayer, the saint said to him that God had prolonged his life for three years. The sinner repented and he died exactly three years later. Paternuthius and Copres rested in the Lord toward the end of the fourth century at a very old age.

5. SAINT THEODORE, BISHOP OF EDESSA AND OTHERS WITH HIM

At age twenty, Theodore was tonsured a monk and spent thirty-six years as a monk. During the reign of Emperor Michael and Empress Theodora, Theodore was elected as bishop of Edessa. He died in the year 848 A.D. Along with him is also mentioned his teacher, St. Theodosius the Syrian Stylite, his brother St. John the Hermit and St. Ader, a wealthy nobleman who left his wife and was tonsured a monk.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PANCRATIUS [PANCRAS]

Pancratius holy, during his childhood,
Warmed himself in the sun of the face of Christ,
And summer after summer flies and flew away
But, in his mind, that face remained,
Day and night, magnificently before him to glow,
Therefore, everything that darkens that image, he rejected:
And the home of his parents and property, he left,
And left every deceptive desire,
And the pleasures of the world that pleases men,
In solitude he departed into a certain wilderness
That to the last day of his earthly course
Becomes intoxicated with the sweetness of the Divine Countenance.
Pancratius in such a way and the Lord otherwise
A glowing beacon does not easily conceal.
Sicily, a pagan land was,
To her [Sicily], the light of St. Pancratius was needed,
To her [Sicily], a witness of Christ's face was needed,
To her [Sicily], the blood of the martyr was needed,
All that she [Sicily] required, Pancratius gave,
As a martyr fell and immortal remained
And above Sicily, remained a light
The light of that face to forever warm it [Sicily].

REFLECTION

Many ask themselves, why God takes young men, young girls and children from this life and why does He not permit them to grow old and then take them through death to the other world? That is God's plan of Dispensation and that is the holy will of His Providence. However, there are some examples in the enormous experience of the Church that sometimes God does so according to the wishes and prayers of his chosen ones in the other world or of relatives. St. Ader (in monasticism Athanasius) appeared to his wife, whom he had suddenly left with three children and entered a monastery where he died. When the wife reached a state of despair first, because of her concern for the helpless children and second, because of her concern for her husband for she did not know where he was, her husband then appeared to her from the other world in a dream with a glowing face and in a radiant white garment and said to her: "Cease to cry and to cry out against me. Behold, I will take two of the children from you to myself and you, if you want, to concern yourself with the salvation of your soul." At the same time and in the same manner, he also appeared to St. Theodosius the Stylite and said to him: "In three days an old hermitess who lives near the monastery will go to the Lord and in that cell put my wife so that she may live an ascetical life as a nun. Let the youngest child remain with her until he grows up. He will walk in my footsteps and will be the successor to the apostolic throne in Jerusalem." And in truth, all this occurred as was foretold. On the third day the old hermitess died and so also did Ader's two older children and his wife assumed the cell of the old hermitess along with the youngest son who, when he grew up, became the patriarch of Jerusalem.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous victory over the Amalekites (**Exodus 17**):

1. How the people defeated the Amalekites as long as Moses prayed to God with upraised hands;
2. How Moses, with upraised hands in prayer prefigures the victorious crucifixion of Christ;
3. How through the power of the Cross and prayer, even I can conquer the darkened passions, which Amalek represents.

HOMILY

-About the judgment of God over the righteous-

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that do not obey the Gospel of the Son of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

When the judgment of God comes upon the house of the righteous, let not the unrighteous maliciously rejoice, but let the unrighteous tremble with fear. If the righteous and the unrighteous are neighbors and the hand of God falls on the righteous, it has fallen on them both: the first to temper and the second to warn. When bitter suffering befalls the righteous, it does not befall him without the will of God. Let not the unrighteous rejoice for this suffering is more for his sake than for the sake of the righteous, that is to say, that he may see the wrath of God and hasten to change his spirit and to correct his works. Let him also ask himself: if there is such a great wrath of God on the righteous, how much more will there be on me?

Therefore, brethren know that justice is strength and injustice is weakness. Who can endure more and not break under the strain: might or weakness? Without a doubt, might. It is for this reason that a heavy yoke (burden) is placed upon the righteous. Let not the unrighteous ridicule when he sees the righteous under a heavy yoke and let him not say: my injustice is better than his justice! Let him look upon the yoke of the righteous with horror and trembling and let him sincerely say to himself: that is my yoke but I am entirely too weak to bear it, that is why it was thrown on his back, on the back of the righteous one, so that I may see and repent of my ways and through repentance become strengthened for the burden that awaits me. "Judgment must begin at the house of God," that is, the immeasurable mercy of God toward sinners, toward the weak ones who have become weakened by sin. Let them open their eyes and read the written wrath of God. "Judgment must begin at the house of God" for the house of God is strong and the house of God is a righteous man in which the Spirit of God abides. When the wind rocks the stony tower, then let the hut dwellers strengthen their huts.

O my brethren, how fateful and awesome are those apostolic words for sinners!

O Lord Jesus, Just and Merciful, Merciful and Just have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FORTY-FIVE MARTYRS: LEONTIUS, MAURICE, ALEXANDER, SISINIUS AND OTHERS

During the reign of the wicked Emperor Licinius, who ruled the eastern half of the Byzantine Empire, there was a great persecution of Christians. In Armenian Nicopolis, St. Leontius, with several of his friends, appeared before Lysius, the representative of Emperor Licinius and declared that they were Christians. "And where is your Christ?" Lysius asked. "Was He not crucified and did He not die?" To that St. Leontius replied: "Since you know that our Christ died, know also that He resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven." After a lengthy discussion about the Faith, Lysius scourged them and threw them into prison and gave them neither food nor drink. Vlassina, a benevolent Christian woman brought them water and handed it to them through the window of the prison. An angel of God appeared to comfort and encourage them. When the time came for sentencing, two jailers and many others appeared before Lysius as converted Christians, totaling forty-five in number. The judge sentenced all of them to death but in this manner: first, that their arms and feet be severed with an axe and then they be thrown into the fire. This horrible two-fold punishment was carried out and the souls of the holy martyrs took flight to their Lord entering into eternal life. They honorably suffered and inherited the Kingdom in the year 319 A.D.

2. VENERABLE ANTHONY OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Anthony was the founder and father of monasticism in Russia. He was born in the small town of Chernigov and, at an early age, left his home and went to Athos, the Holy Mountain, where he was tonsured a monk and lived a life of asceticism in the Monastery Esfigmenou. In obedience to a heavenly appearance, the abbot sent Anthony to Russia to establish monasticism. Anthony chose a cave near Kiev. When those who were desirous of a monastic life gathered around him, he then appointed Theodosius as abbot and he remained in the cave as a Silentary. By the blessing of God, the monastery increased and became the parent-monastery of Russian monasticism. Anthony endured much evil both from men and demons but he conquered all by his humbleness. He possessed the great gift of discerning thoughts and the future and healed the sick. He presented himself to the Lord in the year 1073 A.D. at the age of ninety, leaving his spiritual nursery to bring beneficial fruits to the Orthodox people of Russia throughout the ages.

3. THE TRANSLATION OF THE HONORABLE VESTURE [ROBE] OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

At the time of the suffering of our Lord Jesus for mankind, there was to be found among the ranks of the Roman army in Jerusalem a Georgian named Elioz from the town of Mtskheta. His mother had heard of Christ and, in her heart, believed in Him. Seeing her son off to the army in Palestine, she counseled him not to do anything against Christ. When the Lord was nailed to the Cross, the sound of the hammer on Golgotha reached the ears of Elioz's mother in the town of Mtskheta. Hearing this sound, she cried out: "Woe is me because I did not die before this time. Death would have rescued me from this dreadful sound!" Saying this, she fell dead. Elioz, at that time, was beneath the Cross and with the other soldiers cast lots for the tunic [robe] of Christ. He won the vesture and brought it to Mtskheta and gave it as a gift to his sister Sidonia. She, having heard about the death of the Lord and that her brother was a participant of the shedding of innocent blood, fell dead holding the tunic of the Lord firmly in her hands and no one was able to tear it away but were compelled to bury the tunic with her. A cedar tree sprouted from her grave from which poured forth a sweet-smelling healing myrrh. In time, the cedar tree fell and the place was forgotten. Following her prayer, St. Nina, found this place with the help of a pillar of fire. The baptized Emperor Mirian erected a church there dedicating it to the Holy Apostles. In the year 1625 A.D., the Shah Abbas took this tunic and sent it to Moscow as a gift to Prince Michael Feodorovitch and Patriarch Philaret. This tunic was placed in the Cathedral Church of the Dormition [Assumption] of the Blessed Virgin in Moscow.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE MOTHER OF ELIOZ

The mother of Elioz counseled him:
Elioz, O sight of my eyes,
"Behold, you are entering the imperial army
Precisely in the land of my forefathers.
In that land, the King has appeared
From of old awaited, Christ the Lord.
By the prophets, the Savior prophesied.
To Georgia, news of Him came
Unseen miracles, He performs
And, unheard of words, He speaks
Among men, establishing the Kingdom of God,
Everywhere, news of Him is heard.
Men and angels rejoice
But this joy is darkened
By the evil malice of the Jewish elders,
Thought to kill the Savior
By the new curse, the people oppressed.
But, my son, the sight of my eyes,
In their evil, you do not enter,
Into the Blood of the Just One, do not enter."
Time was passing, in its course,
One day the mother at prayer
The sound of the hammer on the Cross she heard,
The mother screamed as though in a live fire:
"O death, why did you not come to me sooner,
That I do not, that awful sound hear
That announces the death of the Sinless Savior
And of the Jewish nation, the curse.
O son, O Elioz,
To your mother, why did you not listen?
Into the Blood of the Just One, why did you enter?"
Having said this, the lamenting mother,
To the ground fell. To God her soul rendered.

REFLECTION

The thought of death is like a downpour of cold rain, which extinguishes the fire of passions. The Psalmist David says: **"For when he dies he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him" (Psalms 49:17).** Who would not be ashamed when he sometimes sees, even among the unbelievers, a better comprehension of our earthly nothingness than with some Christians? When Caliph Saladin died, a crier [Telal] went before his coffin with a spear in his hand and, on the spear one of the emperor's shirts, and he cried out: "O great Saladin who conquered all of Asia and because of that caused many nations to tremble before him and who conquered emperors: behold of all his glory and of all his subjects he takes nothing with him except this miserable shirt."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous appearance of God to Moses on Mt. Sinai (**Exodus 19**):

1. How Moses climbed to the top of Mt. Sinai and entered the darkness where God was: **"I am coming to you in a dense cloud" [Exodus 19:9];**
2. How the light of God is so great that, before it, all of nature and her light becomes darkness;
3. How the heart of man is like Mt. Sinai; in the darkness of the heart, there God encounters man.

HOMILY

-About the duties of spiritual shepherds-

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight there of, not by constraint but willingly [in God]; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind [good heart]; neither as being lords over God's heritage but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5: 2-3).

Here is the constitution for shepherds of the flock of Christ! In a few words, the holy Apostle Peter unmasks three terrible passions which turn the shepherds of the flock of Christ into wolves: the passion of pride, "not by constraint"; the passion of greed, "not for filthy lucre"; and power, "neither as being lords over God's heritage". Contrary to these pernicious passions, the apostle points out three virtues which must adorn the priest of God: the fear of God (but willingly in God), zeal (but of a good heart) and service (being an example to the flock). The apostle gave this constitution not only as a teacher but also as a prophet. Primarily, the centuries have revealed two types of shepherds: the first were those who, in their lofty positions of governing the Church, were guided by their passions: pride, greed and lust for power and the second, those who were guided by the fear of God, zeal and an example of service. From the former, the Church suffered but did not perish while they perished. From the latter, the Church grew and advanced and shone forth in the world. The former are wolves and the latter are shepherds. The former are enemies both of man and of God and the latter are friends of man and of God. Christ the Chief-Shepherd will seek an accounting both from the former and the latter concerning every sheep, i.e. of every human soul and will justly recompense everyone according to their merit. Pride, greed and lust for power in so-called shepherds will be rewarded by eternal fire and the fear of God, mercy and service of the true shepherds will be rewarded by eternal rejoicing.

O Lord Jesus the Chief-Shepherd, help the shepherds of Your spiritual flock that, to the end, they may fulfill the commandment of Your holy apostle.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT FEMALE MARTYR EUPHEMIA

Saint Euphemia is commemorated on September 16, the day on which she was martyred. On this day, however, is commemorated the miracle surrounding her honorable relics, which was manifested at the time of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon. This Council was convened during the reign of Emperor Marcian and the Empress Pulcheria in the year 451 A.D., after the death of Emperor Theodosius the Younger. The reason for summoning this Council was the heresy of Dioscorus, the Patriarch of Alexandria and Eutyches, an Archimandrite from Constantinople, who spread the false teaching that in Christ the Lord there were not two natures, divine and human, but only one, a divine nature. At this Council Anatolius, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem, played the most prominent roles. Because a conclusion could not be reached through debates and testimonies from either side, Patriarch Anatolius motioned that the Orthodox and the heretics write down their confessions of faith and then place them in the sarcophagus where the relics of St. Euphemia reposed. They all agreed to this. Therefore, the two confessions of faith were written and placed on the bosom of the great female martyr. The sarcophagus was closed, sealed with the emperor's seal and military guards were appointed. All of them spent three days in prayer and fasting. When they opened the sarcophagus on the fourth day, they saw the Orthodox confession of faith in the right hand of the saint and the heretical confession of faith under her feet. Thus the dispute, through the power of God, was decided in favor of Orthodoxy. During the reign of Emperor Heraclius, the relics of St. Euphemia were translated from Chalcedon to Constantinople to the church dedicated to her near the Hippodrome. The iconoclastic Emperor Leo the Isaurian ordered that these relics be tossed into the sea but, in a miraculous manner, the sarcophagus was translated to the island of Lemnos and placed in the church of the great female martyr Glyceria. Then, during the reign of the Empress Irene, the sarcophagus with the relics of St. Euphemia was again returned to Constantinople to its former place. Blood flowed from these relics from time to time which helped those who were ill or in misery.

2. SAINT HELENA [OLGA]

Helena, was a great Russian princess who, before her baptism, was called Olga. Olga was the wife of Prince Igor. Patriarch Polyeuctus baptized her in Constantinople. She was very zealous for the Orthodox Faith in Russia. She entered into eternal rest in the year 969 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR NICODEMUS

Nicodemus was born in Elbasan, Albania. He was married and had children. Deceived by the Turks, he embraced Islam and forced his children to embrace Islam also, except for one son, who fled to the Holy Mt. Athos where he was tonsured a monk. Nicodemus traveled to Mt. Athos to bring his son back but Mt. Athos made such an impression on him that he repented and returned to the Faith of Christ and was tonsured a monk. Because of his apostasy he wept for three years and finally decided to return to Albania to repent of his sin where he previously committed it. Upon returning he declared before the Turks that he is a Christian and was beheaded on July 11, 1722. His miraculous working relics, even today, repose intact and uncorrupt.

4. THE VENERABLE MARTYR NECTARIUS

Nectarius was born in Vryoulla in Asia Minor. At age seventeen he was forced to embrace Islam. He had a similar fate as did St. Nicodemus. When, as a Muslim, he appeared before his mother, she cried out: "Depart from me, I know you not. I bore you as a Christian, not as a Muslim." He repented bitterly and departed for Mt. Athos and there in the Scete of Saint Anne was tonsured a monk. Deciding to suffer for Christ and, thereby to wash away his sin, he again returned to Vryoulla where he suffered martyrdom. He was beheaded for Christ by the Turks in his place of birth on July 11, 1820, at the age of twenty-one.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT OLGA [HELENA] SAINT NICODEMUS SAINT NECTARIUS

God loves penitents
For them, He suffered.
To repentance, He, the sinners
Even now beckons.
Olga, a penitent was,
By baptism, she was born
And from darkness the Russian people
With the Cross liberated.
And from Elbasan, Nicodemus
From Christ turned away,
Repented and returned.
And for the sin, by blood paid.
From Asia, Nectarius
A flower not yet ripened,
Out of ignorance, a Muslim became,
Saddened the angels.
Repented and sorrowed,
A brook of tears shed,
And death more than life,
Painful death, loved.
Turban removed and placed it,
Before the terrible judge
For the Honorable Cross, the head [of St. Nectarius] was taken.
Penitents, Christ loves
And will always love them.
To Christ, who is so dear
As a repentant man?

REFLECTION

A change of fortune strikes the hardest when it strikes unexpectedly. But, he who expects the stroke and guards himself against it beforehand, should he then be surprised? King Charlemagne the Great ordered his sons to learn a trade and his daughters to learn to spin wool in order to be able to earn a living should their fate change. The famous and renown Belissarius, a great general and a great conqueror, was slandered by the envious before the king and on the basis of these slanders was blinded and his estate taken away from him. The blind Belissarius sat before the gates of Rome and begged for alms saying to passers-by: "Give alms to Belissarius whom fortune raised on high but was toppled by envy and deprived of his sight!" The righteous Job says: **"Is not a man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of a hireling?" (Job 7:1).** Therefore, one must be as a watchful guard and prepared for all that may happen. What is there that cannot happen to a man? And yet, in every suffering one must have hope in God. On the dunghill in all his festering sores, the Righteous Job cried out: **"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!" (Job 13:15).**

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous illumination of the face of Moses (**Exodus 34**):

1. How, after his conversation with God on Mt. Sinai, the face of Moses was illuminated by light;
2. How the people saw, and dared not approach Moses, and he placed a veil over his face [**"He placed a veil on his face" Exodus 34:33**];
3. How from sincere prayer and communication with God, the face of God's chosen one is illuminated.

HOMILY

-About obedience and humility-

"Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves, unto the elder. Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5).

Here is the principle of the true catholicity of Orthodoxy! It is based on the unconditional obedience of the younger toward the elders and on reciprocal obedience of equals among themselves, and on the humility of both the elders and the younger. Humility is a good word but better still is the word humbleness and the best word is "humble-mindedness": in essence, humble-mindedness corresponds exactly to the Greek word which the apostle used in his epistle and humble-mindedness signifies lowly thoughts about oneself and higher thoughts about God and constant admission of one's helplessness, one's ignorance, one's viciousness, one's unworthiness and constant recognition of God's power, God's wisdom, God's mercy and God's dignity.

God is the only King of mankind. That is why God opposed the wishes of the Israelites that a king be appointed for them from among the people. God rules and men serve God. Those who rule and those who submit are equally the servants of God. When it is known and recognized that God is King and that all men are servants of God then, by this, the foundation of catholicity is established, the foundation of the angelic society. Upon this foundation then is built the House of God, the angelic society, with the help of the obedience of the younger toward the elders and on reciprocal obedience of peers among themselves and upon the humble-mindedness of all. In this manner, two terrible evils are avoided in the world: tyranny, i.e., one ruling over many by force, and anarchy, i.e., mob rule, thereby avoiding mono-tyranny or poli-tyranny.

The principle of catholicity is an organic principle, i.e., the principle of life. This is the principle of mutual service, mutual help and mutual love. Brethren, may God endow us with wisdom to have recourse toward this saving principle in our lives.

Lord Jesus, obedient and humble Lover of Mankind, implant and confirm in us obedience to Your law and mutual obedience out of love and humble-mindedness toward Your unutterable power and wisdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS PROCLUS AND HILARIUS

These holy martyrs were born in Kallippi in Asia and Proclus was the uncle of Hilarius. They were martyred during the reign of Trajan. "What is your lineage?" the judge inquired of Proclus. Proclus answered: "My lineage is Christ and my hope is my God." When the judge threatened him with tortures, Proclus said: "When you are afraid to transgress the orders of the emperor in order not to fall into temporal sufferings, how much more are we Christians afraid to transgress the commandment of God so that we may not fall into eternal sufferings!" While they were torturing Proclus, Hilarius came before the judge and said: "I also am a Christian!" After much suffering, they were both sentenced to death: Proclus was crucified on a cross and Hilarius was beheaded. Both entered into the joy of their Lord.

2. THE VENERABLE MICHAEL OF MALEINOS

Michael was a wealthy man of noble birth. Rejecting earthly goods in his youth, he withdrew to Mt. Malea, near Mt. Athos, where he lived a life of asceticism, purifying his heart through fasting and prayer. Later on, he had many disciples, of which the most prominent was St. Athanasius the Athonite. Michael died peacefully about the year 940 A.D.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR GOLINDUC [MARY]

Golinduc was a Persian by birth. She entered into marriage with a Persian sage and lived three years in the marital state. She then had a vision of angels who showed her the other world: the torments of sinners and the unbelievers and the joy of the righteous. After this, she left her husband and was baptized. At baptism, she received the name of Mary. Persecuted by her husband, she was sentenced to prison for life. She was imprisoned for eighteen years and remained steadfast in her faith. After this, she was thrown into a pit with a terrible snake but God saved her and the snake did not harm her. When evil young men were sent to defile her, God made her invisible to their eyes. Astonished at her sufferings, many Persians embraced the Faith of Christ. She visited Jerusalem where she denounced the Severian heresy, which taught that the divine nature in Christ suffered for which they read the Trisagion [TrisvjatojeThe ThriceHoly Hymn] in the following form: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy and Immortal crucified for us, have mercy on us." Finally, after preaching the True Faith, she peacefully died near the city of Nisibus in the year 587 A.D.

4. SAINT VERONICA

Veronica is the woman with the issue of blood whom the Lord healed. **"And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment"** (St. Matthew 9:20). Out of gratitude to the Lord her Healer, Veronica ordered a statue of the Lord Jesus be made for her before which she prayed to God. According to tradition, this statue was preserved until the reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate who altered the statue into an idol of Zeus. This is one of the rarest instances that statues of saints were used in the Eastern Church. As is known, the latter became a common practice in the Western Church. Saint Veronica remained faithful to the Faith of Christ until death and died peacefully.

5. THE HOLY MARTYRS THEODORE AND JOHN

Theodore and John were father and son, and by descent Varangians (Vikings) who were baptized and then settled in the pagan city of Kiev. The enraged pagans destroyed their home with them in it and, thus, both suffered for Christ. Their relics repose in the monastery of the Caves of Anthony in Kiev. Those without children and those who miscarry invoke their intercession.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR GOLINDUC

Golinduc of Persian origin,
The heavens saw and a Christian became,
Began to tread the narrow path
Blows to receive from all sides,
As an iron flint strikes,
From the strike, a glowing fire creates,
Thus, pain a human heart strikes.
Until the flame ignites what in the heart is concealed
And the dark paths of men illuminates,
The soul saves from passions sinful.
Golinduc, full of the Spirit of God,
Roof nor bread, did not have
In the world, any friends did not have;
The world, a camp of sufferers to her was
All she had, all for Christ she gave
Because of suffering, as gold she became,
As gold, by fire tempered
Her entire being thus became.
One by one, the torturers died out
Of their wealth, nothing did they take
Except misdeeds and the name of the Evil One.
Golinduc, before God came
As a beautiful fruitful olive tree,
Pure soul, a kin to the angels.

REFLECTION

A strand of justice is thinner than a strand of silk but it is more durable and unbreakable and encompasses both worlds. While a strand of injustice and violence is thick and easily breaks. During the reign of Prince Vladimir of Kiev, only one Christian family lived there, Theodore the Varangian and his son John. At the time of an impure pagan feast, the pagan Kievans, directed by the demon himself, decided to offer John the son of Theodore as a sacrifice to the idols. When some of them came to Theodore and sought his son John in the name of their "gods", Theodore said: "If your gods are alive, let them come themselves and take my son." The enraged pagans rushed into Theodore's house, destroyed it and in the ruins left the dead bodies of both the God-fearing and saintly man Theodore and his son John. Thus far extends the strand of violence. The strand of justice continues. Shortly afterward, Prince Vladimir was baptized and consequently baptized his people on the same spot where the house and the grave of the first Russian martyrs, Theodore and John, stood. A church was erected and dedicated to the All-Holy Birth-giver of God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous punishment and healing of Miriam [Mary], the sister of Moses (**Numbers 12**):

1. How Miriam spoke against Moses: **"Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3);**
2. How suddenly God punished her with the disease of leprosy and how God healed her through the prayer of Moses;
3. How those who cry out at the men of God today, the punishment of God reaches out to them.

HOMILY

-About God's attitude toward the proud and toward the humble-

"For God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Brethren, before whom and before what can a man be proud? Is it before angels? Behold, the angels are immortal and man is mortal. Or before men? Behold, he is dependent on many men and is mortal, as are all men. Or before animals? How could he live without the service of animals? Or before the sun and stars? For without their light he would stagger in darkness and in a few days he would cease to be. Or before vegetation? For vegetation is his main food. Or before the black earth? For from the earth, his body was created. Or before the dead? Without them, he could not enter into life. Or before the living? But among the living there are many of the same, so that among them, he is as a single thread in a rug. Before God? If it were not for the will of God, he would not be either among the living or among the dead. Before whom and before what brethren, can man be proud?

To the lowly and humble God gives grace. That is, He gives them all that they need, all of that for which they pray to Him in their lowliness and in their humility. Who are they, the lowly and humble? They are those who feel their weakness and their complete dependence on the Creator of all. They are as full as the sea and as dependent as the sea. What water is there that is fuller than the sea and what is more dependent on the rains and tributaries? The proud one is as an enclosed well, closed off from heaven and earth and is self-sufficient as long as it is full. When closed off and cut off, it must quickly become emptied.

The wise Solomon prudently speaks about God: **"Surely He scorns the scorers: but He gives grace to the lowly" (Proverbs 3:34).** But God's scorn is not as evil as is man's scorn, rather it is pity and anger. Nor is God's mercy limited as is man's mercy, for it is a royal mercy which startles by its glow, beauty and infinity.

O Lord God, our Creator, humble our heart when it is puffed up by pride and humble our mind when it is puffed up by haughtiness, and help us in the hours of our prideful nothingness to remember the Cross on Golgotha and Your Only-begotten Son, in blood and agony for us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

This great archangel of God is celebrated on March 26. On this day however, he is celebrated and honored for his appearances and miracles throughout the entire history of man's salvation. It is believed that this celebration was first established on Mt. Athos in the ninth century, during the reign of Emperor Basil and the Empress Constantina Porphyrogenitus and Patriarch Nicholas Chrysoverges, on the occasion of the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel in a cell near Karyes where he wrote on a stone tablet with his finger, the hymn to the Birth-giver of God, "Worthy It is meet," [Dostojno Jest Axion Estin]. As a result of this, even today, this cell is called the cell of "Axion Estin." In connection with this, other appearances of the Archangel Gabriel are also commemorated: the appearance to Moses while he was tending the flock of Jethro and, at which time, he related to this great one called of God, how the world was created and all the rest which Moses recorded in his Book of Creation (Genesis); his appearance to the Prophet Daniel and revealing to him the mystery of future kingdoms and of the coming of the Savior; his appearance to St. Ann and the promise that she will give birth to a daughter, the All-blessed and All-pure Holy Virgin Mary; the very brief appearance to the Holy Virgin while she lived in the Temple in Jerusalem; the appearance to Zacharias the High Priest and the tidings concerning the birth of John the Forerunner and the severe punishment of Zacharias with dumbness because he did not believe his words; again, the appearance to the Holy Virgin in Nazareth and informing Her of the good news of the conception and the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ; the appearance to the righteous Joseph; the appearance to the shepherds near Bethlehem; the appearance to the Lord Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane when he strengthened our Lord as a man prior to His passion; the appearance to the myrrh-bearing women and so forth.

2. SAINT JULIAN, THE BISHOP OF CENOMAINS [LEMANS, FRANCE]

Some think that this saint is none other than Simon the Leper, who was cured by the Lord. The Apostle Peter consecrated him a bishop and sent him to pagan Gaul, where St. Julian endured great miseries but succeeded to convert many people to the Faith of Christ. When he baptized Prince Defenson, many subjects of this prince turned to the True Faith. By the grace of God, he worked great miracles: he healed the sick, cast out demons and resurrected the dead. He ended his life peacefully and, at the time of his death, appeared to Prince Defenson in the middle of the day while he was at lunch.

3. THE VENERABLE STEPHEN OF SABAS

Stephen was a first cousin to St. John Damascene. He lived a life of asceticism in the Monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified for which he was surnamed Sabas. He was a great imitator of the life of St. Sabas and a shining star among the monks in Palestine. He reposed in the Lord in the year 794 A.D., in his sixty-ninth year.

4. THE VENERABLE FEMALE SARAH

As a young maiden, Sarah withdrew to live a life of austere mortification and for sixty years lived a life of asceticism on the shores of the Nile river not far from Alexandria. By her example she attracted many women to the monastic life. She found rest in the Lord in the year 370 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JULIAN

When St. Julian passed away,
Wonderful shepherd of Christ's flock,
His spiritual child, Prince Defenson,
With the noblemen was at lunch,
At lunch in the middle of the day.
All at once, the prince stared,
An apparition unusual, he saw:
In the middle of the room, Julian stood,
In vesture, gilded with gold
As a bishop in the temple of God,
In an unusual light;
With a smile, looked at the prince.
Beside him, three deacons radiant,
With tapers in white hands
That apparition shown and disappeared,
Frightened, the prince leaped to his feet,
To his noblemen spoke:
"Behold, I saw Father Julian,
The saint, our baptizer
Could be that he, from his soul, departed
Into the Heavenly Kingdom moved."
And on the road the prince set out,
Until, in the home of Julian he arrived,
And as he arrived, so he learned,
His soul to God, Julian presented.

REFLECTION

A man adorns simple clothing and ornate clothing adorns a man. Simple clothing calls attention to the man, but ornate clothing calls attention to itself. The passion for ornate clothing simply drains and withers the soul of man. This is the real reason why the Church from time immemorial stood against opulence in dress and recommended the simple and plain. Among the countless Christian saints there is no mention of one for whom ornate clothing helped to attain sanctity. Many great and wise kings, not only Christians but also heathens, loved simplicity in dress. Thus, it is said that the Emperor Augustus Octavius, during whose reign the Lord Christ was born wore only simple clothing which was woven for him by his wife, sister or daughter. Of King Charles V, it is said, that he wore such simple clothing that even ordinary citizens, his subjects, were better dressed than he. A man once invited the glorious Greek military general Philopomenes to dinner in whose home he had never previously entered. Philopomenes arrived at the home of his host a little early. The host had not yet arrived and, the hostess not knowing Philopomenes personally and seeing him attired in simple clothing, thought that he was a servant of Philopomenes who was sent in advance to inform her husband of the coming of the military general. Because of this, she ordered him to chop wood. Philopomenes willingly acceded to her command and began to chop wood. When the host came and saw what this honored guest was doing, he was horrified and asked him: "Who dared to give this type of work to Philopomenes?" Quietly, the military general answered: "My clothing."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the great patience of God toward the unbelieving Jewish generation and their deserved punishment (**Numbers 14**):

1. How God worked a multitude of miracles before the eyes of the Israelites and how they remain stubborn in their unbelief and murmured against Moses;
2. How God punished them, making them wander for forty years in the wilderness and all of them perished except Joshua and Caleb;
3. How even some of us perish in the wilderness of sensuality and do not enter into the land of spiritual honey and milk in the Kingdom of Christ.

HOMILY

-About the indispensability of sobriety in battle against the devil-

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Orthodox monks have elevated sobriety and vigilance to the status of mortification. The spirit must be sober in order to sense danger and vigilant in order to recognize from which side the danger is coming and from whom.

My child, be vigilant that you do not tread on a serpent, that you do not fall into a pit, that you do not encounter a wolf, that you do not step out into deep water, that you do not stray from the path and get lost in the forest! Thus a mother counsels her child, fearing for his body. With no less love does the Church counsel a man, fearing for his soul. Therefore children, **"be sober, be vigilant."** Your old adversary the devil does not rest nor sleep but, similar to a hungry lion, stalks and seeks whomsoever he can devour. "Be sober, be vigilant," for you are as sheep and he is as a lion. When sheep sense the foul odor of the wolf, they flee to their shepherd. Therefore, **"be vigilant"** all of you and sense the foulness of the devil when he approaches you and flee immediately under the wings and protection of your shepherd, Christ the Lord. And You will sense the odious smell of the devil through your thoughts, through your feelings, through your intentions and through your passions of the flesh. All that you would have thought, imaged, felt, intended and desired contrary to Christ and the Law of Christ, know that that is the snare of the devil, the foulness of the devil know that and flee to your Shepherd directing your entire mind and all your heart and all your soul and body to Him.

O Lord Jesus, our Sober and Vigilant Shepherd, make us "sober and vigilant" at every moment so that our enemy will not surprise us and devour us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE AQUILA

Aquila was one of the Seventy Apostles. As a Jew, he first lived in Italy with his wife Priscilla. When Emperor Claudius decreed that all Jews be driven from Rome and Italy, Aquila settled in Cornith, where the Apostle Paul met him for the first time and remained in his home for a year and a half and baptized him and his wife. Burning with zeal for the Faith of Christ, Aquila and Priscilla escorted Paul to Ephesus and assisted him in his apostolic labors. Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus in which, toward the end, he says: **"Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the Church that is their house" (1 Corinthians 16:19)**. After the death of Emperor Claudius, the Jews were permitted to return to Italy, and so Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome. After this the Apostle Paul writing the Epistle to the Romans from Cornith, greets his old friends and his co-laborers: **"Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus; who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles" (Romans 16: 3-4)**. Later on, we see Aquila in Ephesus where he labors together with St. Timothy the Apostle. Chained in Rome, Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus: **"Salute Priscilla and Aquila" (2 Timothy 4:19)**. As a bishop, Aquila baptized many and illumined them with the Faith, destroyed idols, built churches, ordained priests and spread the glory of the Incarnate Son of God among men. In the end, he was murdered by the wicked heathens and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Christ.

2. THE VENERABLE HELLIUS

Hellius was an Egyptian monk of the fourth century. From his early youth he dedicated himself to monastic asceticism in the wilderness, that by his life and powerful miracles, he stirred the astonishment of monks and laity alike and even though he fled the glory of men, he was unable to conceal himself. He endured great struggles with the temptations of the devil, especially during the time of prolong fasting. One time, the devil offered him honey and another time delicious apples but Hellius did not allow himself to be deceived. He was able to discern the hearts of men, was able to discern everyone's passion and thought, not in order to show his inner knowledge, but to correct men.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT AQUILA SAINT PRISCILLA

The torch of light from the heavens descended
Into the hearts of the apostles entered first,
With it, the apostles enlightened men,
By it, their successors are strengthened.
And with this torch, Saint Aquila
Spiritually enlightened by the great Paul
And Blessed Priscilla, his faithful wife,
Their entire house, the power of the Cross filled.
Evil and vain amusements, they abandoned
Into the world, on the work of the Lord they embarked.
Assisted Paul, solitary prisoner
Willingly assisted Saint Apollos
And to Timothy, Paul's child;
Brought many to the flock of Christ.
Blessed are the sacrifices of Blessed Priscilla,
Blessed are the wounds of Saint Aquila,
Good fruit, they bore all over
Laborers, inherited the Kingdom of God.

REFLECTION

Christians must arm themselves against the abominations of this world. They must be armed against every attack and against all temptations, so that every evil rebounds from them. Armor is not made in a day, nor in two days but is diligently and laboriously wielded by long-lasting exercise. Of what value is all our virtue if we succumb to the first abomination? Speaking of this, Saint Gregory of Nyssa cites an example with a monkey in Alexandria. He says: "An animal trainer in Alexandria taught a monkey to skillfully impersonate a female dancer on stage. The spectators at the theatre praised the monkey who was dressed as a female dancer and danced to the beat of the music. But while the viewers were occupied observing such a novel spectacle, a comedian wanted to show everyone that a monkey is nothing more than a monkey. While they all shouted and applauded at the skill of the monkey, the comedian tossed sweets on the stage, sweets that monkeys particularly like. As soon as the monkey saw the sweets, he forgot the dance, the applause, the expensive clothing and jumped with his paws for the sweets but as his dress interfered, he began to tear it apart with his nails attempting to remove it. Instead of praise and amazement, laughter commenced among the viewers." For through the torn mask of the "dancer," a monkey was revealed.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the just punishment, which God sent upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (**Numbers 16**):

1. How these three incited the people against Moses and Aaron and all sought to become leaders;
2. How the earth opened up and swallowed Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and others with them;
3. How the earth of the body swallows the souls of all those who think bodily and, thinking thusly, they rebel against the law of God.

HOMILY

-About the steadfastness of faith-

"Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Peter 5:9).

Brethren, the most important fortress of the souls of men is the fortress of faith. It is upon this fortress that the devil vehemently attacks with all his arrows and all of his wiles. For the impure and evil spirit knows that when this fortress is destroyed he enslaves the soul of man forever. That is why the holy apostles prayed to the Lord: **"Increase our faith" (St. Luke 17:5)**. Brethren, let us also pray daily that the Lord increases our faith, that He empower and strengthen our faith. The serpent primarily protects its head in danger, which is why the Lord Himself called it wise. Let us also protect the head of our spiritual life which is faith. Nothing in this world can replace faith in God: neither philosophy, nor science, nor treasure, nor glory, neither the entire world from one end to the other with all its transitory illusions. This the devil knows. That is why he especially attacks our faith, instilling doubt in us, causing us to waver, confusing our thoughts and disturbing our hearts. Since the devil knows that faith is the principle thing, it is all the more necessary that we should know it also. Because of us Christ descended to earth, because of us He suffered on the Cross and gave us the covenant of an All-saving Faith.

We can neither strengthen faith nor increase faith except through suffering. That is why the much-suffering Apostle Peter says: "That the same afflictions (such as yours) are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." The apostle does not speak of his affliction out of humility but rather speaks of the affliction of our brethren in Christ. One in faith and one in affliction. Brethren, you do not suffer alone for the True Faith but your other brethren also suffer for the same Faith.

Let this comfort your afflictions. But most of all let the afflictions of the First-born in suffering, our crucified Lord Jesus Christ Himself, comfort you.

O Lord Jesus, Sufferer above the sufferers and Victor above the victors increase our faith and strengthen us with the power of Your Grace as you did strengthen Your holy apostles.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR JULITTA AND HER SON, CYRIACUS [QUIRICUS]

Saint Julitta was of noble birth. She was widowed at an early age with her newborn child Cyriacus. She lived in Iconium in the town of Lycaonia and was completely devoted to the Faith of Christ. She immediately baptized her son after his birth and when he was three years old instructed him in the Faith and taught him to pray as much as a child of that age was capable. When Diocletian decreed the persecution of the Christians in the town of Iconium, much innocent blood was shed. Julitta took her son and hid from the wrath of the heathen in the city of Seleucid. It was not any better there. Julitta was arrested and, as a Christian, was brought before the judge. Since Julitta courageously confessed her faith in the Lord Jesus, the judge, in order to make her feel sorrow and cause her to waver, took the child in his arms and began to caress him. Cyriacus cried out loudly: "I am a Christian, release me to my mother!" Cyriacus turning his face away from the judge began to scratch him with his hands. The judge became so enraged that he hurled the child to the ground and pushed him with his feet. The child slid along the stone stairs and gave up his holy and innocent soul to God. Seeing how Cyriacus suffered before her eyes, St. Julitta was joyful and gave thanks to God because He made her son worthy of the martyr's wreath. After much suffering, Julitta was beheaded in the year 304 A.D. The relics of Saints Cyriacus and Julitta, even today, are miracle working. Part of the relics of these saints is to be found in Ohrid in the hospital chapel of the Holy Birth-giver of God.

2. SAINT VLADIMIR THE GREAT, PRINCE OF RUSSIA

At baptism Vladimir was called Basil and was the son of Prince Svyatoslav, and the grandson of Igor and Olga. In the beginning Vladimir was a total pagan both in his belief and in his lifestyle. Learning that other faiths exist, he carefully began to inquire as to which of them was the very best. For this reason he sent emissaries to Constantinople. When the emissaries returned they informed the prince that they attended a service in the Orthodox Church of the Divine Wisdom and that they were "outside themselves, not knowing whether they were on earth or in heaven." This inspired Vladimir to be baptized and to baptize his people. The main idol, Perun, was removed from the hill of Kiev and hurled into the Dnieper river. After embracing the Christian Faith, Vladimir completely changed his life and exerted all of his efforts to correctly fulfill all the rules of this Faith. In place of the destroyed idols, Vladimir ordered churches to be built throughout his state and he built a beautiful church to the All-Holy Mother of God in Kiev. This church was built on the same spot where St. Theodore and his son, John, earlier suffered martyrdom for Christ (July 12). With that same irresistible effort with which Vladimir earlier protected idolatry, he now spread Christianity. He found repose in the Lord in the year 1015 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS JULITTA AND CYRIACUS

**The rage of idolatry, when it ruled the world,
Julitta, with the child Cyriacus suffered,
Two innocent victims, two neo-symbols,
Of the Incarnate Word, two living witnesses.
Of all earthly riches, more precious is truth,
Neither for herself nor for her son did the mother grieve,
Over youth, wealth nor strength, did not grieve,
Follows in Christ's footsteps, without turning back
Who, the truth recognizes, is born again,
To peace and freedom, truth leads him.
Blessed Julitta, the truth sensed
When with the Cross she was baptized and with the Faith illumined.
Full of God's peace and true freedom
Without screams and fear, she saw her son dead
Without screams and fear, her head she placed under the sword
By a martyr's death, she glorified the Truth.**

REFLECTION

Hospitality is respected in other faiths but Christianity emphasized hospitality as an obligation and responsibility. On the other hand, gratitude for hospitality is no less an obligation and responsibility for Christians. He who learns to be grateful to men for hospitality will know how to be grateful even to God for hospitality. For what are we here on earth except as guests of God? What are angels in heaven except as guests of God. The story is told about Emperor Philip of Macedonia, how he severely punished one of his courtiers for ingratitude. The emperor sent his courtier overseas to fulfill a task for him. The courtier accomplished this task and returned by boat. A tempest destroyed the boat and the courtier found himself in the waves. Fortunately, it was not too far from the shore. A fisherman saw the man drowning, hurried to his assistance with his small boat and brought him ashore. After he recovered and rested, the courtier returned to the emperor and related the unfortunate incident about the tempest on the sea. The emperor wishing to reward the courtier asked him what does he wish the emperor to give him? The courtier mentioned that fisherman and said to the emperor that he would like most of all if he would grant him the property along the sea belonging to the fisherman. The emperor granted the courtier his wish. When the courtier settled on the estate of his greatest benefactor [the fisherman], then the fisherman in great despair went to the emperor, related all and complained. He said that he saved the life of the courtier and now he ousted him from his home. Upon hearing this, the emperor became furious with the ungrateful courtier and ordered that he be branded on his forehead with the words: "ungrateful guest."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous blossoming of Aaron's rod (**Numbers 17**):

1. How God, in order to quiet the murmuring against Moses and Aaron, ordered that the rods of all the elders of the tribes be placed in the Meeting Tent;
2. How overnight only the withered rod of Aaron became green and blossomed and brought forth fruit;
3. How even the souls of men, dead to sin, God can enliven.

HOMILY

-About grace and peace-

"Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter 1:2).

Brethren, grace and peace multiplies "through the knowledge of God." However, brethren, through the knowledge of creation outside of God, as cut off from God or contrary to God, sorrow and unrest multiplies. Sorrow and unrest is multiplied among those who are familiarizing themselves with things without the knowledge of God; does it not sufficiently witness to the multitude of suicides precisely among those who chose, as a trade for themselves, to study the nature and life of mankind without God? O how great a multitude among them are nervous, irritated, embittered, darkened and hysterical souls who are only separated by a day or a month from suicide. However, grace and peace multiplies "through the knowledge of God." That, the apostle personally experienced and his precious experience he passes on to others.

Neither grace nor peace are the gifts of the earth but rather are the gifts of heaven. God bestows these gifts to those who labor to multiply their knowledge about Him.

Brethren, what is the quickest path which leads to the knowledge of God? Without a doubt, through "Christ Jesus our Lord." He is the Revealer and He is the Revelation, He is the Wise and the Wisdom, He is the Teacher and the Knowledge. Grace is from Him. Peace is from Him. He who knows God through the knowledge of created beings in nature and through the laws of nature, as the heathens do, does nothing wrong but progresses along the path in a round about manner and proceeds on an indirect path upon which many go astray and are lost. But he who comes to the knowledge of God through conscience and destiny of men, as the moralists do, does nothing wrong but that one also goes by in a round about manner and difficult path and can go astray and become lost. But he who knows God by knowing the Lord Christ is on the shortest and surest path.

O Lord Jesus, help us on the path to You and to Your Father and the Holy Spirit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR ATHENOGENES, BISHOP OF SEBASTE IN ARMENIA

Athenogenes lived in a monastery near the town of Sebaste with ten of his disciples. During the reign of Diocletian, Philomarchus, a cruel persecutor of Christians, came to Sebaste. He arrested and murdered many Christians in the town. When he saw Athenogenes and his disciples, he told the elder to offer a sacrifice to the idols so as not to be slain as were the other Christians. Athenogenes replied to him: "O persecutor, those whom you mention as being slain are not slain (dead) but rather are in the heavens and rejoice with the angels." It was a touching sight to see a female deer, whom the merciful Athenogenes fed with his own hand, run up to him and seeing him in misery began to shed tears. Even the wild beasts of the mountain had greater pity toward the martyrs of Christ than the heathens! After cruel tortures, during which an angel of God comforted the martyrs, they were all beheaded; at first the priests and all co-laborers of Athenogenes and after that, Athenogenes himself. All were received into the heavenly fatherland in the year 311 A.D.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR JULIA THE VIRGIN

Julia was born in Carthage of distinguished lineage. When the Persians captured Carthage many people were taken into slavery. Saint Julia was captured, enslaved and fell into the hands of a merchant in Syria. That merchant was a pagan. Seeing that Julia was a Christian, he counseled her on many occasions to deny Christ and become one in faith with him but Julia could never agree to this. Since Julia was faithful and trustworthy in service, the merchant left her in peace and did not speak to her about faith again. On one occasion, the merchant loaded the boat with goods and took Julia along with him and sailed to distant lands on business. When they arrived at Corsica, there was a pagan feast and the merchant joined in this blasphemous offering of sacrifice but Julia remained aboard the boat weeping because so many men lived in foolish error and did not know the truth. Somehow the pagans found out about her, removed her from the boat, even though her master objected to this, and then began to brutally torture her. They severed her breasts and threw them on a rock and, after that, they crucified her on a cross, upon which St. Julia gave up her soul to God. Her death was revealed by an angel of God to the monks on the nearby island of Margarita or Gorgona and the monks came and honorably buried the body of the martyr. Many miracles appeared at the grave of St. Julia throughout the centuries and from the other world she herself appeared to some. She suffered honorably in the sixth century. After many years, the faithful wanted to erect a new church in another place in honor of St. Julia because the old church had become too small and dilapidated. Therefore, they gathered building material on a new site: stone, bricks, sand and all else that is required. It so happened that at night, on the eve of the day when they intended to lay the foundation, all of this material was moved to the site of the old church by an invisible hand. In confusion, the men again carried the materials to the new site but the same thing happened again: the material was removed to the old site alongside the old church. The night watchman saw a young maiden "all aglow" on white oxen, carrying the material to the old church. From this everyone understood that St. Julia did not wish that her church be built in another place, so they demolished the old church and on that same site built a new one.

3. THE HOLY 15,000 MARTYRS

These fifteen thousand martyrs were beheaded for the Faith of Christ in Persia.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR ATHENOGENES

Athenogenes was the author of the hymn sung at Vespers: "O Gladsome Light" - "Svete Tihi" Fos Ilaron." He died for Christ by fire and was made worthy of eternal glory in the Kingdom of God.

5. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE SIX ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

This common commemoration of the first Six Ecumenical Councils is held on the Sunday between the 13th and the 19th of July.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR JULIA THE VIRGIN

The martyr Julia,
For her, Christ was crucified,
The power of Christ, she invokes,
The power of the Honorable Tree.
Blood poured from six wounds,
With blood, stained the earth,
For, in Christ she believed,
Her faith, she did not conceal.
Nor did Christ conceal her,
To the entire world, proclaimed her,
And in the Kingdom Immortal
In heaven, glorified her
When Julia expired
Her spirit, pure and holy,
From her mouth, a white dove
To the heights soared
When men saw this
All in fear, cried out:
"Woe to the evil judges"
That righteous blood, they shed!

REFLECTION

The Ecumenical Councils are the greatest battles of Orthodoxy with heretics. Under today's date, the Church jointly commemorates the first Six Ecumenical Councils:

1. The First Ecumenical Council in Nicea, 325 A.D. with 318 holy fathers participating. This Council is commemorated separately on May 29 and on the Seventh Sunday after Easter. This Council refuted the heresy of Arius against the Son of God.
2. The Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, 381 A.D. with 150 holy fathers attending. This Council is commemorated separately on May 22. This Council refuted the heresy of Macedonius against God, the Holy Spirit.
3. The Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus, 431 A.D. with 200 holy fathers participating. This Council is commemorated separately on September 9. This Council refuted the heresy of Nestorius against the Mother of God.
4. The Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon, 451 A.D. with 630 holy fathers participating. This Council is commemorated separately on July 16. This Council refuted the Monophysite heresy.
5. The Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, 553 A.D. with 160 holy fathers participating. This Council is commemorated separately on July 25. This Council refuted the heresy of Origen.
6. The Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, 681 A.D. with 170 holy fathers participating. This Council is commemorated separately on January 23. This Council refuted the Monothelite heresy.
7. The Seventh Ecumenical Council which was convened in 843 A.D. with 367 holy fathers participating. This Council is not commemorated at this time but is commemorated separately on October 11. This Council refuted the heresy of Iconoclasm.

At these Councils, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, all these heresies were condemned and the Faith of Orthodoxy was defined and confirmed for all time.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous bring forth of water from the rock in Kadesh (**Numbers 20**):

1. How Moses, at God's command struck the rock with his rod but without faith and, how through the will of God, water flowed;
2. How God punished Moses and Aaron because of their lack of faith, and He did not permit them to enter into the Promised Land;
3. How this, shows that even a great righteous one as was Moses, is prone to sin that no mortal should be carried away by his virtues.

HOMILY

-About the participation of the faithful in God's nature-

"That by these you might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

Brethren, how can mortal man have a part in God's nature? How can eternity be a companion of time and glory with unglory, the incorruptible with the corruptible, the pure with the impure? They cannot without particular conditions and these conditions the Apostle Peter mentions: one condition on the part of God and the other on the part of men. As a condition on God's part, the apostle mentions: **"According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3)**. As a condition on the part of man: **"having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4)**. God has fulfilled His condition and gave us His power. **"Through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3)**. Now it is man's turn to fulfill his condition, i.e., to know Christ the Lord is to escape from the bodily desires of this world. The Lord Christ first opened heaven and all the treasures of heaven and then He called mankind to draw near and to receive those treasures. How did He invite them? Did He invite them only by words? In words, but not only words but also "called us to glory and virtue"; glory, i.e., by His glorious resurrection; virtue, i.e., by His miraculous service and suffering. By this He invited us to receive the exceeding great promises that, by them, we may partake in God's nature. But in order that we may know Christ and to hear His invitation, we must first escape from all physical desires of this world. If we do not escape, then we will remain blind before Him, before His glory and virtue and deaf to His invitation!

O brethren, how enormous is the mercy of God toward us! According to this great mercy, God offers to us mortals adoption by the Immortal One and to us sinners to be built up into the glorified Body of the Lord Jesus. But, only under one condition, which is neither a great yoke nor a heavy cross.

O Lord Jesus, the Fulfillment of all promises and the Source of all good, heal us from our blindness and deafness and grant us power to escape the physical desires of this world.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR MARINA

Marina was born in Pisidian, Antioch of pagan parents. At the age of twelve Marina learned about the Lord Jesus Christ; how He became incarnate of the All-Pure Virgin, how He worked many miracles, how He suffered death on the Cross and gloriously resurrected. Her young heart became inflamed with love for the Lord and she vowed that she would never marry and further desired in her soul to suffer for Christ and to be baptized in the blood of martyrdom. Her father hated her because of her faith and did not consider her as his daughter. The imperial deputy Olymbrius, learning from Marina that she was a Christian, first wished that she would become his wife. When Marina rejected that he ordered her to bow down before the idols and to that St. Marina replied: "I will not bow down nor offer sacrifice to the breathless and dead idols who do not recognize themselves nor do they know that we honor or dishonor them. I will not give them that honor which belongs only to my Creator." Then Olymbrius subjected Marina to harsh torture and threw her into prison completely covered with wounds and blood. While in prison Marina prayed to God and, after prayer, the devil appeared to her under the guise of a horrible serpent which entwined itself around her head. When she made the sign of the cross the serpent burst and vanished. Then she was engulfed with a heavenly light and it seemed to her that the walls of the prison vanished together with the roof and a radiant and towering cross appeared and atop the cross a white dove, from which a voice came saying: "Rejoice Marina, rational [discerning] dove of Christ, daughter of Zion in the highest, for your day of rejoicing has arrived." Marina was healed from all her wounds and pains by the power of God. The demented judge tortured her the following day, both in fire and in water, but Marina endured all as though she were in another body. Finally he condemned her to be beheaded. Before her death the Lord Jesus appeared to her with angels. She was beheaded during the reign of Diocletian but in soul and power she remained alive in the heavens and on earth. A hand of St. Marina reposes in the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mt. Athos. However, atop Mt. Langa in Albania overlooking Lake Ohrid, there is a monastery dedicated to St. Marina with a portion of her miraculous relics. Countless miracles have occurred and still occur in this monastery, whose witnesses are not only Christians but many Muslims as well. So much did the Turks have respect for this holy place that they never dared disturb either this holy place or the property of this monastery. At one time a Turk was the guardian of the monastery.

2. THE VENERABLE LEONID USTNEDUM

From his youth this Russian saint lived a spiritual life of asceticism in several monasteries in Solovetz, Mirozh as well as elsewhere. Finally, he founded his own monastery along the Luza River in the province of Vologda. He lived a strict life of mortification until his soul was filled with the light of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. As a beacon, Leonid attracted many to the ascetical life of mortification. He is called Ustnedum, because at one time when he was bitten by a poisonous serpent, he did not want either to think or to talk about it and he remained alive. Pleasing God in all things, Leonid died peacefully on July 17, 1653 A.D. His relics repose in his monastery.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR MARINA

Saint Marina, to the Lord prayed,
And with warm tears, she strengthened her prayers;
Lord Jesus, my God and my Savior,
Everyone who in You hope, You help.
Be near me, near to my soul,
When the unbelievers begin my body to destroy,
Be near me, O Strength of martyrs,
That, without fear and screams, I endure pains.
Before the hungry wolves, as sheep I stand,
As a lonely bird before many hunters,
As a miserable fish snared by the net
But, the Lord of salvation, to You I gaze!
My body, as a cheap sack, let them tear apart,
O Christ, You will I not deny;
Then all decaying pleasures, with You sufferings I like,
Only to Your authority, O Savior I bow down
Conqueror of death, the devil and Hades,
These victories now, through me repeat!
For all, Lord and Savior, to You thanks,
That You help everyone who hopes in You.

REFLECTION

Until Christ becomes all for the soul completely all which generally has a certain permanent and unchanging value, until then, man cannot enter into suffering for Christ. How could St. Marina the fifteen-year-old girl enter into suffering for Christ? For to her, Christ was all completely all! How could Saint Julitta have rejoiced upon seeing her three year old son Cyriacus dead for the Faith of Christ? Again, for her, Christ was all completely all. Behold, how St. Tikhon of Zadonsk speaks in detail of how Christ is all to man in the form of a conversation between Christ and man:

"Do you desire good for yourself?
Every good is in Me.
Do you desire blessedness?
Every blessedness is in Me.
Do you desire beauty?
What is more beautiful than Me?
Do you desire nobleness?
What is more noble than the Son of God and the Holy Virgin?
Do you desire height?
What is higher than the Kingdom of Heaven?
Do you desire riches?
In Me are all riches.
Do you desire wisdom?
I am the Wisdom of God.
Do you desire friendship?
Who is a kinder friend than I Who lay down My life for all?
Do you desire help?
Who can help except Me?
Do you seek joy?
Who will rejoice outside of Me?
Do you seek comfort in misery?
Who will comfort you outside of Me?
Do you seek peace?
I am the peace of the soul.
Do you seek life?
In Me is the source of life.
Do you seek light?
'I am the Light of the world' " (St. John 8:12).

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous brass serpent in the wilderness (**Numbers 21**):

1. How all the people would have died from the bite of the serpents, until Moses raised the brass serpent on a pole;
2. How all, who were bitten by a serpent, as soon as they gazed upon the brass serpent were made whole;
3. How the brass serpent pre-figures Christ on the Cross.

HOMILY

-About the need to repeat and repeat-

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

The plower sows in the field. Does not the plower repeat the same task every second? How would he, therefore, plow the field if not plowing from morning to dusk deepening furrow after furrow?

The traveler walks the road. Does not the traveler repeat the same task every second with the same effort? How else would he have traveled the road and reached his destination?

The carpenter prepares the boards in his workshop. Does not the carpenter repeat the same task with every board, with the same labor? How else would he be able to prepare the ordered amount of prepared boards?

Brethren, is not all of our beneficial works comprised of strands and strands of repetition? Therefore, let not the preacher of the truth become slothful and let him not say: "I told them so and I will not repeat it!" Let not the hearer of the truth become proud and let him not say: "I heard it once and I do not need to hear it again!"

O preacher of the truth, do not be afraid to repeat and to repeat: that through repetition you teach and by repetition you remind. Without repetition even the field is not plowed, nor the path traveled, nor the framework [rafters] of the house prepared. And you [preacher of the truth] are to plow, to lead and to prepare.

O hearer of the truth, do not become proud and do not say that you heard the truth once. Truth is food for the soul. You have eaten bread today, yesterday and the day before yesterday and for months and years past. And again you will eat it, so that your body would be healthy. Nourish also the soul. Nourish it with the truth, the same truth, yesterday, today and tomorrow and until death so that your soul may be healthy, strong and radiant.

O Lord Jesus, nourish us every day and every hour with Your truth which is Yourself O Jesus, sweet nourishment!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR EMILIAN

During the reign of Julian the Apostate, in the Thracian town of Dorostolon, lived a young man, Emilian, a servant of the mayor of the town. When the apostate emperor began to destroy Christianity throughout the realm of the Roman Empire by fire and sword and, when the emperor's representative came to Dorostolon to kill the Christians, he did not find a single one. Rejoicing at this, he sponsored a great banquet for the citizens of Dorostolon and ordered sacrifices to be offered to the idols and rejoicing ensued throughout the entire town, day and night. That night, St. Emilian entered the pagan temples, markets and the streets of the town and smashed all of the idols with a sledgehammer. The next day there was terror in the city. Everyone sought the destroyer of their gods. A peasant was passing by the temple that morning and was seized. Emilian, seeing that an innocent man would suffer, said to himself: "If I conceal my works, what benefit would I receive from that which I did? Before God, will I not be found as the murderer of this innocent man?" Therefore, he appeared before the emperor's legate and admitted all. The enraged legate asked Emilian, who had prompted you to do this? The martyr of Christ replied: "God and my soul ordered me to destroy those lifeless pillars which you call gods." The judge then ordered that Emilian be flogged and, after flogging and other tortures, ordered him to be buried alive. Thus ended the earthly life of St. Emilian and he was received into the heavenly life on July 18, 362 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE PAMBO

Pambo was an Egyptian and an ascetic on Mount Nitria. He was a contemporary of St. Anthony the Great, and himself was great in monastic asceticism. He was known particularly for two characteristics: through extensive training, he sealed his lips so that he did not speak one unnecessary word and that he never ate anyone's bread except that bread which he earned with his own hands by weaving reeds. He was similar to an angel of God and, in later years his face shown like the face of Moses once did, so much so that the monks were unable to look him in the face. He did not render an immediate answer even to a simple question before praying and contemplating about it in his heart. The Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria once visited the monks in Nitria. The monks begged Pambo saying: "Tell the pope a constructive word, which would be beneficial to him." The quiet Pambo replied: "If he does not benefit by my silence he will not even benefit by my word." At one time, St. Pambo with his monks traveled throughout Egypt. When they came upon a group of men who remained seated as the monks passed by, St. Pambo addressed them and said: "Arise and greet the monks so that you may receive a blessing from them for they continually converse with God and their lips are holy." This glorious saint was able to discern clearly the fate of both the living and the dead. He rested in the Lord in the year 386 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE PAISIUS AND ISAIAH

Paisius and Isaiah were brothers of a wealthy family. They were both monks. One became a saint because of his asceticism in the wilderness and the other because of his works of mercy toward men. Saint Pambo saw them both in Paradise. This settled a dispute among the monks concerning the question: Which is better asceticism and a life of mortification or corporal works of mercy? Both, one and the other, lead to Paradise when it is done in the Name of Christ.

4. VENERABLE JOHN, THE ONE WHO SUFFERED MUCH

John was a recluse in the Monastery of the Caves of St. Anthony in Kiev. Throughout thirty years of his life he was tortured by lustful passions, which he ceaselessly struggled against until finally he conquered them with God's help and by touching the relics of St. Moses the Ugrian (July 26). Being victorious over impure passion, St. John was surrounded by an internal heavenly light by which he could see at night as though it were day.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PAMBO

The monks asked Pambo the Blessed:
"Is it good to praise your neighbor?"
Then Pambo was silent and to the brethren replied:
"It is good to praise but it is better to remain silent."
And still, they asked Pambo: "And who is perfect?"
"For the sake of the will of God, one who denies his own."
The monks remained silent while one will say:
"Yet one more reply, do not deny us:
And what kind of garment should a monk have?"
"The kind you throw away and no one takes."
Thus the saint spoke and closed his mouth,
For he protected his tongue in order not to speak unnecessarily.
Pambo, all radiant at the hour of his death
Questioned about his life, he uttered:
"Undeserving bread, I never did taste,
Neither for a word, my soul repented."

REFLECTION

Which is more pleasing to God: a life of mortification in the wilderness or works of mercy? Men of prayer in the wilderness think that man among men, no matter how many good works he performs, will find it difficult to safeguard the purity of the heart and to direct the mind toward God. Benefactors of men say: that the man in the wilderness is totally occupied with his own salvation and does not help in the salvation of others. Two Egyptian brothers, Paisius and Isaiah, inherited a great estate from their parents, sold the estate and each took their share of the money. One of them immediately distributed his money to the poor, became a monk and withdrew into the wilderness to lead a strict life of asceticism that through patience, fasting, prayer and purifying the mind from all evil thoughts in order to save his soul. The other brother likewise became a monk, but did not want to enter the wilderness rather he built a small monastery near the town, a hospital for the sick, a public refectory [dining room] for the needy and a resting place for the sorrowful. He dedicated himself completely to the service of his fellow men. When both brothers died, a dispute ensued among the monks of Egypt: which of the two fulfilled the law of Christ? Unable to agree among themselves they came to St. Pambo and questioned him about this. St. Pambo replied: "Both are perfect before God; the hospitable one is similar to the hospitable Abraham and the ascetical one is similar to Elijah the Prophet, both of whom equally pleased God." But not all the monks were satisfied with this response. Then St. Pambo prayed to God to reveal the truth to him. After praying for several days, St. Pambo said to the monks: "Before God I tell you that I saw both brothers Paisius and Isaiah together in Paradise." With this, the dispute was settled and all were satisfied.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous experience of Balaam (**Numbers 22**):

1. How Balaam came to prophesy to Balak, the prince of the Moabites;
2. How the angel appeared on the road with a sword and prevented Balaam from advancing forward;
3. How the ass saw the angel before Balaam and spoke to his master.

HOMILY

-About the remembrance of the imminent separation of the body-

"Yes, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle(body) to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ had showed me" (2 Peter 1: 13-14).

Here is a good reminder to lovers of the body who, because of the body, forgot their souls. The body must be put off. No matter how costly we hold it to be, no matter how much worth we attach to it, no matter how much we caress and pamper it, we must put it off one day. O how powerful and truthful are these words "to put it off!" When the soul is separated from the body, the soul puts off the body as no longer necessary. Those who suffer shipwreck reach the shore on a plank. They come to the shore and discard the plank. When spring blossoms, the serpent sheds its skin and puts it off. When a butterfly wings its way out of the cocoon, the cocoon is put off. In the same manner the body is put off when the soul departs from it. No longer of use and without benefit, even harmful to other men, it is put off from the house, put off from the city, put off from the sun and is buried deep into the ground. Think about this, you who live in luxury and are adorned, you who are haughty and gluttonous!

As long as the soul is in the body, it should utilize the body for its salvation submitting to the law of God and performing the works of God. Do you see how the apostolic soul is a lover of labor! "As long as I am in this tabernacle (body) to stir you up." That task was given to him by God. He wants to conscientiously complete it to the end because he must put off his body. Brethren, let us labor first to embrace the apostolic warning and secondly, to remind others, all others, for whom we wish good. In haste we are approaching the shore of the other old world, as the hour hastily approaches when we must put off the bodies and, with a naked soul, appear before the judgment of God. What will we say at the Dread Judgment Seat of God? To what goals have we, in this earthly life, used the device from the earth, which is called the body?

O Lord Jesus, Righteous Judge, direct our mind to think of death and judgment.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE FEMALE MACRINA

Macrina was the eldest sister of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa. As a young virgin, Macrina was betrothed to a nobleman. When her betrothed died, Macrina vowed never to enter into marriage saying: "It is not right for a maiden once betrothed to a young man to seek another: according to the law of nature there must be only one marriage as there is but one birth and one death." She further justified this by her faith in the resurrection considering her bridegroom, not dead but alive in God. "It is a sin and a shame," says Macrina, "for a wife not to safeguard her faithfulness when her husband travels to a distant land." After this, together with her mother, Emilia, she received the monastic tonsure in a convent, where they lived a life of asceticism with other nuns. They lived from the labors of their hands devoting a greater part of their time to godly thoughts, prayer and the constant uplifting of their minds to God. In time her mother died and, afterward her brother Basil. Nine months after the death of St. Basil, Gregory came to visit with his sister and found her on her death bed. Before her death, Macrina lifted up her prayers to God: "You, O Lord, Who gives rest to our bodies in the sleep of death for a time, will again awaken them [the bodies] at the last trump. Forgive me and when my soul divests itself of its bodily attire and presents itself before You, pure and without sin, grant that it may be as incense before You." After that she traced the sign of the cross on the forehead, eyes, face and on her heart and gave up her soul. She found rest in the Lord in the year 379 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE DIUS

Dius was born of Christian parents in Antioch, Syria. From his youth, he was taught by godly-inspired men in the monastic life and in asceticism. Since he persevered in a lengthy and laborious battle with the devil and passions of the flesh, God endowed Dius with the great gift of working miracles. In his prayers he, most often, turned to the Holy Trinity. He performed great and awesome miracles through the power of his prayers: he caused a withered staff to blossom, a dry well to be replenished with water and an unbelieving man he struck dead and then resurrected him again. After two brief heavenly visions, Dius departed from Antioch and settled in Constantinople where, in the proximity of the city, he continued his life of asceticism. His fame spread rapidly and even Emperor Theodosius the Younger visited him to receive counsel from him and Patriarch Atticus persuaded and ordained him a presbyter. Having lived for many years, Dius began to prepare for death, received Holy Communion, instructed the brethren, lay down on his bed and died before the eyes of all. The news of his death drew many people; even Patriarch Atticus came with Alexander, the Patriarch of Antioch. When they were about to bury him, he suddenly arose as though awakening from sleep and said: "God has given me fifteen more years of this life." St. Dius lived for exactly fifteen years and led many to the path of salvation, healed many, helped many in various misfortunes and needs and finally gave up his soul to the Lord, Whom he faithfully served all his life. He died in the year 430 A.D. in extreme old age.

3. THE COMMEMORATION OF STEPHEN THE TALL

Stephen was the son of the Serbian Prince Lazarus and Princess Militza. He was a protector of Christianity in the Balkans during most difficult times. He was the founder of the beautiful monumental monasteries of Manasija and Kalenich. After many labors and troubles he died on July 19, 1427 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY AND VENERABLE DIUS

From early youth to extreme old age
The miracles of God's mercy, Dius counted,
God's mercy and God's justice.
Night and day, Dius directed his thoughts
In the divine light, in the divine paths,
Repelling passions and demons bitter.
What is a human being? As a murky water
That the image of the heavenly firmament does not accept.
Can the murky water transparent become,
That in it heaven can be mirrored?
It can, Dius claims, with the walk of the saints,
But, with the help of the Cross of Christ the Savior.
The Cross, in the heart place, in the midst of your being,
Affix to it your thought and God you will see
And the water murky cleared up will be,
And until now, miracles unseen you will see.

REFLECTION

One of the most beautiful adornments of a woman is her modesty and immodesty in a woman is the most unnatural and most repulsive spectacle in the world. A wonderful example of feminine modesty was shown by St. Macrina in her life. In her youth, a bitter wound opened up on her breast; even though her mother counseled her to show the wound to a doctor and seek a remedy, Macrina did not agree to it. She had completely dedicated herself to God and would not allow even the thought of exposing her body before men and not even before her own mother. One evening Macrina earnestly prayed to God; from her eyes tears flowed, which fell to the dust before her. With unwavering confidence in her Lord, with her fingers she mixed the dust with her tears and with that anointed her wound. The next day she awakened healthy. When her mother, with great sorrow entered to see her daughter, Macrina did not want to reveal that the Lord healed her (out of humility, concealing the miracle which she herself performed through her prayer) but begged her mother saying: "I will be healed, my mother, if you place your right hand on my bosom and make the sign of the cross over the spot of the wound." The mother reached out her hand and made the sign of the cross over that spot but did not feel the wound anymore but only the scar of the healed wound. Thus did St. Macrina conceal her body out of modesty and her miracle-working out of humility.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous prophesying of Balaam (**Numbers 23, 24**):

1. How Balaam came to curse the people of Israel at the invitation of Prince Balak;
2. How instead of cursing, Balaam blesses the people, being directed to do so by the Spirit of God;
3. How Balaam prophesied about Christ saying: **"A star shall rise out of Jacob and a rod will rise up out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17).**

HOMILY

-About apostolic love and discernment-

"Moreover I will endeavor that you may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Peter 1:15).

Brethren, let your hearts be opened, to receive and to understand this great mystery. Primarily, the apostle says that he will not be slothful in reminding the faithful of the salvific truths of the Faith; of the divine power which was given to mankind through Christ the Lord and for the preparing of men to receive this divine power **"escaping from the corruption that is in the world through lust" (1 Peter 1:4).**

Now he goes even further and promises that he will continue this remembrance even after separation, i.e., after my exodus (the word which is used in the Greek text) from this life, when he will **"put off this tabernacle, his body" (1 Peter 1:14).** O faith divine, O comfort, O sweetness! Even from the other world, the apostle promises to continue his concern for the Church of God on earth, to continue his work once begun to remind the faithful and to continue his love toward those on earth who believe in Christ. O apostolic love, so near to the love of Christ! O apostolic discernment, whose love the Spirit of God does not diminish as long as man is still wrapped in the dark curtain of the flesh!

The Apostle Peter gave this promise to the faithful nearly two thousand years ago. Did he fulfill it? He fulfilled it to the letter, not only as some would like to interpret it, reminding the faithful, not only through his written epistles and through his successors the bishops, but primarily by his constant action within the Church from the other world. The Apostle Peter appeared many times as did the other apostles whenever, according to the Providence of God, there was a need to appear and he reminded the shepherds and the faithful of the Church how they must adhere firmly to the truth and how they should correct the paths of their lives. Even when Peter did not appear to be seen in a dream or openly, he, in a mysterious manner known only to heaven, acted and still acts always, for our salvation.

Life after death to the Holy Apostles was as apparent as is the sun to those who have eyes. Though their prayers may God also open our spiritual eyes, to know where we are going and what awaits us after death.

O Lord Jesus, All-merciful, deliver us from the darkness into the light according to Your mercy and through the prayers of Your Holy Apostles.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET ELIJAH

Saint Elijah, one who saw God, a miracle-worker and a zealot for faith in God, was born of the tribe of Aaron from the town Tishba for which he was called the Tishbite. When St. Elijah was born, his father Savah saw an angel of God hovering around the child, wrapping the child in fire and giving him a flame to eat. That was a foreshadowing of Elijah's fiery character and his God-given fiery power. He spent his entire youth in godly thoughts and prayers withdrawing frequently into the wilderness to contemplate and to pray in solitude. At that time the Jewish kingdom was divided into two unequal parts: the kingdom of Judah consisting of only two tribes, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin with their capital in Jerusalem and the kingdom of Israel consisting of the remaining ten tribes with their capital in Samaria. The first kingdom was governed by the descendants of Solomon and the second kingdom was governed by the descendants of Jeroboam, the servants of Solomon. The greatest confrontation that the prophet Elijah had was with the Israelite King Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel. For they, Ahab and Jezebel, worshipped idols and were turning the people away from serving the One and Living God. Before this, however, Jezebel, a Syrian, persuaded her husband to erect a temple to the Syrian god Baal and ordered many priests to the service of this false god. Through great miracles Elijah displayed the power and authority of God: he closed up the heavens, so that there was not any rain for three years and six months; he lowered a fire from heaven and burned the sacrifice to his God which the pagan priests of Baal were unable to do; he brought down rain from heaven by his prayer; miraculously multiplied flour and oil in the home of the widow in Zerepath, and resurrected her son; he prophesied to Ahab that the dogs will lick up his blood and to Jezebel that the dogs will consume her flesh, all of which happened as well as many other miracles did he perform and prophesy. On Mount Horeb, he spoke with God and heard the voice of God in the calm of a gentle breeze. Before his death he took Elisha and designated him as his successor in the prophetic calling; by his mantle he divided the waters of the Jordan river; finally he was taken up into the heavens in a fiery chariot by flaming horses. He appeared on Mount Tabor to our Lord Jesus Christ together with Moses. Before the end of the world St. Elijah will appear again to put an end to the power of the anti-Christ (**Revelation, Chapter 11**).

2. SAINT ELIJAH, THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AND SAINT FLAVIUS, THE PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH.

Saint Elijah and Saint Flavius were great zealots for the Faith and defenders of Orthodoxy. They were driven into exile by the heretical Emperor Anastasius where they both died. They precisely foresaw the death of Emperor Anastasius as well as their own death. Simultaneously they corresponded with each other from afar: "Anastasius the emperor died today, let us both go before the judgment of God with him." After two days both saints died in the year 518 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ELIJAH THE PROPHET

Fiery man, the Prophet Elijah,
With heavenly radiance, glowed on earth
Pleased the Lord with your prayers
You closed the heavens and from heaven brought down fire,
All with the help of God's All-powerful right hand;
Because of their lukewarm faith, you rebuke men;
For the Living God, you diligently labored
And, as its prophet, the Church celebrates you.
The king did not frighten you and the queen even less,
Your king and your possession, the Lord God is.
Neither about food nor about drink did he worry.
To God's Providence, you were completely devoted
Without fear of anyone, you were a fear to everyone.
As a powerful lion who is a fear to small mice.
For the Living God you diligently labored
And as its prophet, the Church celebrates you.
As so few, the Lord glorified you
For the Living God you glorified:
To ignite sacrifices, God sent you a fire;
To resurrect the dead, power He gave you.
The entire world, your powerful work amazed,
All your prophecies were fulfilled,
With soul and body, you were alive and whole,
That is why death did not have any part in you.
Both in soul and body, fiery prophet
Glory to you! We exclaim with a joyful soul.

REFLECTION

Writing about the life of his sister St. Macrina, St. Gregory of Nyssa hesitates to enumerate her miracles, "that I not be," says he, "responsible for the sin of unbelief among helpless men." He calls helpless, those who do not believe. Truly, there is nothing more helpless than a man without faith. The man without faith believes in the power of dead things and dead elements of nature and does not believe in the power of God or in the strength of the men of God. That is spiritual dullness and that dullness is equated with spiritual death. Thus, the living souls believe and the dead souls do not believe. Living souls believe in the powerful miracles of the Prophet Elijah. These miracles give them courage and joy, for they know that they are a manifestation of the might of God. When God manifests His might through lifeless things and elements of nature, why then would He not manifest it through living and holy men? That which especially gives joy to the faithful is that the Prophet Elijah appeared alive on Mount Tabor at the time of the Transfiguration of the Lord. During his life on earth, this great prophet gave proof of the existence of the One and Living God and, after his death, and even after several hundred years, by his appearance on Mt. Tabor, he gave to mankind visible proof of life after death.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous help of God to the Israelites in battle (**Deuteronomy 2**):

1. How Moses defeated the pagan kings, Sihon of the Amorites and Og, king of Basan, for God promised that they would perish;
2. How Moses was unable to take the land of Moab, for God did not want this because of the descendants of the righteous Lot;
3. How victory and defeat in wars generally do not occur without God's permission.

HOMILY

-About the personal witness of the apostle-

**"This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.
And this voice which came from heaven we heard,
when we were with Him in the holy mount"
(2 Peter 2:17-18).**

Let us hear the testimony of the true and faithful one who was crucified on a cross because of his testimony. Let us hear the Apostle Peter who, what he was unable to prove by his words, proved by his bloody death on the cross, crucified upside down by the pagans. He testifies that he was on the holy mountain, i.e., Mount Tabor when our Lord was transfigured, when Moses with Elijah appeared and when a voice was heard from heaven saying: **"This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17)**. In this text, the apostle does not speak of what he and his companions saw on the holy mountain, which is narrated in the Gospel, but repeats only that which they heard. That which they heard is just as important as that which they saw. Therefore, let the people hear that the apostle saw the Lord Jesus transfigured in a miraculous heavenly light and let them know that He is the Son of God. Let the people also hear that the apostles saw Moses and Elijah alive and let them know that life after death exists as well as the judgment of God. Let them also hear, that the Lord Jesus is called the Son of God, not by man, but rather by God the Father Himself. Those who speak these words to the people and relate to them what their eyes saw and what their ears heard are faithful and true witnesses. He, who does not believe the apostles, believes in Judas, Caiaphas, Herod and Nero, the persecutors of the apostles and traitors of the truth. He who does not believe in the righteous ones has no other alternative left but to believe in the unrighteous ones. He who does not believe in the pure ones, must believe in the impure ones. He who does not believe in those who suffer for the truth, must believe in the torturers and libertines. Day does not dawn for anything else except that men may take sides with one or the other.

O Lord our Savior and Enlightener, enlighten our souls by Your holy words, for which Your apostles suffered.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was the son of a priest from the town of Sarir. He was taken to Babylon into captivity with King Jeoiachim along with many other Israelites. Living in captivity, Ezekiel prophesied for twenty-seven years. He was a contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah. While Jeremiah taught and prophesied in Jerusalem, so Ezekiel taught and prophesied in Babylon. The prophecies of Jeremiah were known in Babylon and the prophecies of Ezekiel were known in Jerusalem. Both of these holy men agreed in the prophecies of each other. Both were mistreated and tortured by the unbelieving Jewish people. St. Ezekiel had frightening and unimaginable visions. By the river Chebar, Ezekiel saw the heavens open, **"a great cloud and a fire infolding itself and a brightness was about it"** (Ezekiel 1:4) and four wild creatures like molten copper [burnished brass]. One creature had the face of a man, the second the face of a lion, the third the face of a calf [ox], the fourth the face of an eagle [Ezekiel 1:10]. The face of the man signifies the Lord Incarnate as a man, the face of the lion, His divinity, the face of the calf, His sacrifice and the face of an eagle, His resurrection and ascension. At another time he was shown the vision of the resurrection of the dead. The prophet saw a valley full of dry dead bones and when the Spirit of God descended upon them, they came to life and rose to their feet [Ezekiel 37:1-10]. He also saw the most terrible destruction of Jerusalem when the wrath of God mowed down all, except those who were earlier marked with the Greek symbol called Tau [Ezekiel 9: 1-7]. This mark is like our letter T which is also the sign also of the Cross. The evil of the Jews did not even spare this holy man. Infuriated at him because he rebuked them, the Jews tied him to the tails of horses and ripped him in two. He was buried in the same sepulchre with Shem, the Son of Noah.

2. THE VENERABLE SIMEON AND JOHN

These two young men left their homes and relatives: Simeon, his aged mother and John, his young wife. Both received the monastic tonsure at the hands of the Abbot Nikon in the Monastery of St. Gerasimus and withdrew into the wilderness where they lived an austere life of asceticism for many years. Through rigorous asceticism, they mortified their bodies so much that they resembled two withered trees. One day Simeon said to John that, according to God's command, he must depart from the wilderness and go among the people and there serve God. John gave him this counsel: "Guard our heart against all that you will see in the world. Whatever you touch with your hand, do not allow it to touch your heart. Whatever you eat with your mouth, let not your heart be satisfied. When your feet begin to walk, let there be peace within you. And whatever you do outwardly, let not your mind remain disturbed. Pray to God for me, that He does not separate us, one from the other, in the future life." St. Simeon accepted the counsel of his companion, kissed him and, after that, departed the wilderness and went among the people as a "fool for Christ," to teach men and to convert them to the Faith of Christ. He pretended insanity before men but his heart was the temple of the Holy Spirit and, in that temple, was unceasing prayer. He possessed abundant grace from God and was able to discern all the inner secrets of men, both near and far, healing men from evil spirits and other ailments. Dancing in the streets as one insane, he approached men and whispered their sins in their ears and called them to repentance. He even appeared to sinners in dreams, rebuked them for their sins and called them to repentance. Thus it was with Bali, a pagan actor, who openly mocked Christian shrines and to whom St. Simeon appeared in a dream, rebuked and warned him so that he repented and became a model Christian. A young fornicator went out of his mind because of sexual promiscuity. Seeing this insane young man, St. Simeon struck him across the face with his hand and said: "Do not commit fornication." At that moment the unclean demon departed from the young man and he became well.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROPHET EZEKIEL

The vision of Ezekiel, by God's will:
Wide, wide, immense field,
Overfilled, overfilled with the bones of the dead,
And a voice from heaven to Saint Ezekiel came:
Son of man, these bones do you see?
Living guests on earth were they at one time
At My table, I served them well
But very few of them worthily repaid Me.
Will they come alive, these dead bones?
The prophet became frightened, over to melancholy gave himself:
Lord, Lord, that You can know,
They must arise, if You command.
A rumble and shock and trembling then began,
The resurrection of the dead, the prophet, a miracle saw!
The bones rose up and bone next to bone lay
Then flesh, then sinews and the skin tightened,
At this miracle, the terrified prophet gazed
And glorified God with his heart and soul.
What the prophet of God discerned in the spirit
The resurrected Lord clearly showed.
When the Spirit wills, the dead will resurrect,
As in a new garment, all in a living body
And with Christ, the faithful will rejoice,
To reign eternally, in His kingdom.

REFLECTION

For the sake of his fellow man, St. Simeon left his only friend in the world, his peaceful cell in the wilderness, and made himself out to be a "fool for Christ". It is told how the Spartan King Lycerges, made great sacrifices for the benefit of his fellow citizens. He issued strict laws, instituting a completely new system of educating the young and instituting order in the State. When he issued these laws, he said to his fellow citizens that he desires to go to Delphi, where there was a great shrine and demanded that they all take an oath to faithfully adhere to his laws until his return. When all the citizenry laid down the oath, Lycerges left his country and never did return. It is a great sacrifice to leave one's homeland and voluntarily live in a strange country for the sake of the benefit of one's fellow man. But how much greater is the sacrifice to voluntarily leave one's mind and continually pretend before men to be as one without a mind. Is not insanity the greatest foreign land known to man? To live in this terrible strange land year after year and that, all for the benefit of your fellow men!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous crossing of Israel over the Jordan river (**Joshua 3**):

1. How by the power of God and through Joshua, the waters in the river Jordan parted and the priests with the people crossed over;
2. How the priests with the Ark of the Covenant, during the time that the people crossed over **"stood on dry land in the Jordan" (Joshua 3:17)**;
3. How even I, need not be afraid of the floods of this world, as long as in the center of my being, i.e., in the heart, I firmly hold the covenant of the Lord.

HOMILY

-About the false teachers-

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

Man is at war in this world. Continual is the battle and numerous are the enemies. Among the most dangerous enemies belong the false teachers. Only if the mind of man is directed toward the Living God will he be safeguarded from these dangerous enemies. False teachers are either as blindmen or as thieves; first, because of their blindness they [false teachers] lead both themselves and others into destruction and second, because of their hatred and envy they intentionally lead others astray, and hand over both their souls and bodies to the fires of hell. The Lord Himself prophesied: **"Many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11)**. The apostle only confirms the words of his Lord. Both false prophets and false teachers will sow the seed of destruction among the people. These are "damnable heresies" by which some will deny their Lord Who redeemed mankind by His All-pure Holy Blood. Many false teachers have already appeared and have sown many heresies, damnable as tares, throughout the world. Brethren, if you know those "damnable heresies" which the Holy Fathers condemned at the Councils, then you will be able to recognize the principle seed of poison, which the devil through his servants sow in the field, over which the Savior had sown pure wheat.

But even if you know or, if you do not know, direct your mind toward the Lord, enclose your mind with the sign of the Cross, call to your assistance the Holy and All-pure One [The Theotokos], chosen ones of God and especially your guardian angel and do not be afraid. Along with this always ask the Church and the Church, being more experienced and victorious against all falsehoods, will tell you what is the truth. For you are from yesterday and the Church is from time immemorial. Your memory is shorter than the memory of the Church.

O Lord Jesus, You are the only Path, the only Truth, the only Life. O Lord do not permit, that we be led by false teachers and to apostate ourselves from You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Mary Magdalene was one of the myrrh-bearing women and "equal to the apostles". She was born in the town of Magdala along the shore of Lake Gennesaret and was from the tribe of Issachar. She was tormented by seven evil spirits from which the Lord Jesus freed her and made her whole. She was a faithful follower and servant of the Lord during His earthly life. Mary Magdalene stood beneath the Cross on Golgotha and grieved bitterly and mourned with the All-Holy Birth-giver of God. After the death of the Lord she visited His sepulchre three times. When the Lord resurrected she saw Him on two occasions: once alone and the other time with the other myrrh-bearing women. She traveled to Rome and appeared before Tiberias Caesar and presenting him with a red colored egg, greeted him with the words: "Christ is Risen!" At the same time, she accused Pilate before Caesar for his unjust condemnation of the Lord Jesus. Caesar accepted her accusation and transferred Pilate from Jerusalem to Gaul where, this unjust judge, in disfavor with the emperor, died of a dread disease. After that, Mary Magdalene returned from Rome to Ephesus to St. John the Theologian whom she assisted in the work of preaching the Gospel. With great love toward the resurrected Lord, and with great zeal, she proclaimed the Holy Gospel to the world as a true apostle of Christ. She died peacefully in Ephesus and, according to tradition, was buried in the same cave in which seven youths were miraculously put to sleep for hundreds of years and, after that, were brought to life and then died (August 4). The relics of St. Mary Magdalene were later transferred to Constantinople. There is a Russian Orthodox convent dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene near the Garden of Gethsemane.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR PHOCAS

On this day we commemorate the translation of the relics of St. Phocas from Pontus to Constantinople about the year 404 A.D. The primary feast of this saint is celebrated on September 22 and on that day a brief hagiography of his life and his sufferings is recorded. Today, one miracle of this saint is commemorated. The Arabs captured a man named Pontinus. The Arabs shackled him, bound his hands to his back and left him to die. Lying on his stomach on the ground, and not being able to move, Pontinus cried out: "O Holy Martyr Phocas have mercy on me and save me!" Saying this he fell asleep and, in a dream, saw Saint Phocas approaching him, touched him by the hand and said: "The Lord Jesus Christ forgives you!" When the man awoke, he found himself loosed from all bonds and free. He arose and departed for his home and took St. Phocas as the patron saint of his household.

3. THE VENERABLE CORNELIUS OF PEREYASLAVL

Cornelius was tonsured a monk at age fifteen by an elder called Paul. Later on, he withdrew into the wilderness to a life of silence. Cornelius lived in silence for thirty years not speaking to anyone, not even a word, and many considered him to be a mute. He became so withered through fasting, that he resembled a skeleton. Before his death he received the Schema [The Great Angelic Habit] and found repose in the Lord on July 22, 1693 A.D.

4. THE HOLY-FEMALE MARTYR MARCELLA

Saint Marcella enjoys enormous respect on the island of Chios. In the church dedicated to her miracles occur every year. Not much is known about her life. However, according to tradition, Marcella was an unusually pious girl who, at an early age, was left motherless. Her pagan and bestial father wanted to live with his daughter as with a wife. Marcella fled from her father but he, enraged as a wild beast, caught up with her and hacked her to pieces. In the proximity of her church there are certain stones which, from time to time, become permeated with blood. People take these stones, bring them to church, pray to St. Marcella and place them on the sick who, from that, become healed.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Magdalene, in dark sorrow wrapped herself
Because of the bloody death of the Son of God.
Sorrow is to love, the most bitter sorrow,
It, in the world, has no comfort or companion,
To it, tears are comfort and pain its only companion,
To Saint Magdalene, in darkness the world became wrapped.
The weak creation of man, asked for light,
Without hope, in the dark Mary groped.
His tomb to her is light but behold, the tomb is empty!
Stolen she thought, naked and not anointed!
Bitterly she wept, to weeping never any end,
At that moment, a man's voice beside her, she heard:
Woman, why are you weeping, tell me: Whom do you seek?
Whom do I seek, you ask? To comfort me, do you wish!
But, if you took Him away, where did you place Him?
Tearful and melancholy, Jesus looked at her,
And with a sweet voice called her: Mary!
In Mary's heart, a light began to shine
O familiar voice, with sweetness unsurpassable,
The voice overly generous by life and power!
With that voice, the Lord healed the sick,
With that same voice, He resurrected the dead.
Life-creating voice, a miraculous voice!
Mary recoiled and turned around
Rabbi, she cried out at that moment the sun came out
A New Day dawned to Mary and to the world.

REFLECTION

"Blessed are they that mourn" (Matthew 5:4), said the Lord. Blessed are they who mourn asking for the Kingdom of God. Blessed are they who mourn suffering for the Faith in Christ. Blessed are they that mourn repenting of their sins. There can be no true repentance without tears. With what shall we wash away our sins if not through tears or through blood, the blood of martyrdom? The monks of Nitria sent a petition to St. Macarius the Great asking if he would come to them rather than they all come to him. Macarius obeyed and came to them. All the monks gathered around St. Macarius and begged him for a word of instruction. Macarius began to weep and through his tears said: "Brethren, let tears flow from your eyes before you go over there where our tears will fry our bodies." Then all the brethren began to weep.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous appearance of the archangel to Joshua, the son of Nun, when he set out to conquer Jericho (**Joshua 5**):

1. How the Captain [Commander] of the heavenly hosts appears to Joshua with a drawn [naked] sword in his hand;
2. How the **"Captain of the Lord's host"** told him to remove his shoes (**Joshua 5:15**);
3. How even we, in the battle of life, should not rely on our own feet, and in our own equipment, but only in Him who battles for us.

HOMILY

-About the inexorable justice of God-

"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly" (2 Peter 2: 4-6).

O how will the sinful man be spared? "And spared not the old world but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow". Therefore O sinful man, how then can you be spared? Are you dearer and more precious to Him than millions of angels, from so many people drowned by the Flood [Deluge] and from densely populated cities? When the angels are cast into the darkness of Hades, people are drowned by the flood and cities are burned to ashes in what do you hope, sinning, continually sinning and not turning away from sin? You say, in the mercy of God! But, is God more merciful now than He was then? Does God change as man does? Do not hope without measure [limit] but according to the measure [limit] of your efforts as regards the improvement of your life, let that be your hope. Truly, great is the mercy of God, long is the patience of God and infinite is the love of God. Behold, God loves you more and is more merciful to you than you are to yourself and He continually wishes you salvation even more than you yourself do. But he, who to the end mocks the mercy of God and he, who to the very end laughs at the patience of God and he, who to the end opposes the love of God, will God then take him by force into His kingdom and make him a fellow citizen with the angels and saints?

How terrible is the darkness of Hades, the clanging sound of chains and the gnashing of teeth? Those who ridiculed the mercy of God and opposed the love of God dwell there [Hades]. Will you want to go there, O prodigal soul? God does not desire that you go there; the angels mourn because you are headed there; the saints are praying that you return; Holy Church offers sacrifices for you that you would come to your senses. If you despise all of that O why would you despise it all! Then what kind of mercy do you expect from God?

O righteous Lord, help us that we may, in due time turn away from the path which leads to the darkness of Hades, make us to understand and strengthen us in goodness, before You send Your angel to take away our soul.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JULY - 23 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS TROFIMUS AND THEOPHILUS AND THIRTEEN OTHERS WITH THEM

They all suffered in Lycia during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. Because they would not, in any way, deny Christ nor offer sacrifices to the idols, they were subjected to various tortures: they were beaten with stones; they were scrapped with sharp irons; their knees were broken; and finally, so tortured, they were more dead than alive and were thrown into the fire. The power of God preserved them and they remained unharmed. They were then taken out and beheaded. The Lord glorified them both on earth and in His heavenly kingdom. They suffered honorably in Lycia in the year 308 A.D.

2. THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR APOLLINARIUS

Apollinarius was a disciple of the Apostle Peter and was born in the city of Antioch. St. Peter took Apollinarius with him from Antioch to Rome and, in Rome, consecrated him as the bishop of Ravenna. Arriving in Ravenna, Apollinarius entered the home of the soldier Ireneaus, whose son he healed of blindness and through that converted his entire household to the Faith of Christ. He also cured the wife of the military commander of Ravenna of a terrible malady and baptized his entire household. At the wish of the military commander, Apollinarius remained in his home. There they constructed a small domestic chapel. Apollinarius remained there for twelve years preaching the Good News and baptizing unbelievers. On many occasions he was cruelly tortured by the pagan elders but the all-powerful right hand of the Lord sustained and saved him. Finally, he was sentenced to exile in Illyria in the Balkans. The boat upon which Apollinarius traveled was shipwrecked in a storm and sunk and of all the passengers aboard only St. Apollinarius, along with two soldiers and three of his clerics, was saved. Being miraculously saved, the soldiers believed in the power of Apollinarius' God and were baptized. Apollinarius then went to preach the Holy Gospel throughout all the Balkans descending as far as the Danube river. After this, he set out for Thrace where, under great pressure, he also spread the Gospel of the Lord. After three years of labor in the Balkans he was again banished to Italy. He arrived in Ravenna where all the faithful exceedingly rejoiced at his return. Hearing about this, the pagan elder wrote to Emperor Vespasian about Apollinarius as being a magician and asked him whether they should give him over to death as an enemy of their gods. The emperor replied that they should not kill him but only ask him to offer sacrifice to the gods or to banish him from the city for, says the emperor: "It is not dignified to seek revenge against anyone for the gods, for they themselves can avenge against their own enemies if they are angered". In spite of this order from the emperor the pagans attacked Apollinarius and pierced him with knives. This servant of God died of severe wounds and was received into the Kingdom of God. The relics of St. Apollinarius repose in the church dedicated to him in Ravenna, Italy.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT APOLLINARIUS

Apollinarius, for the sake of Christ the God
Endured sufferings, great and many
Without any kind of anger, without any surprise,
For he knows that there is no salvation without suffering;
He knows that without suffering the Lord did not go
And saw Peter's pierced hands.
Knows about many, slaughtered as lambs
And by a sword into the Kingdom of God sent
And with the soul disposed, for that he was prepared,
That for the Living Christ, to endure public shame,
And the saint, all that the powers of Hades
Had prepared for the torturing of the faithful,
The saint endured all; with faith bore
And growing older, growing older, under the bitter torture
And even when he became old, the torturing did not pass,
Under bitter tortures, for Christ died,
By his heroism, many generations he astonished
Did not die but went to live eternally.

REFLECTION

The great teachers of the Church endeavored to teach men great truths, not only by words but also by obvious examples. Thus Abba Isaiah, in order to teach the monks, said that no one would receive a reward from God who, in this life did not labor for God, brought his disciples to a threshing floor where a farm laborer gathered the winnowed wheat. "Give me some wheat also!" said Isaiah to the farm hand. "Did you reap, Father?" "I did not", replied the elder. "How do you expect to obtain wheat when you did not reap?" To that the elder replied: "Does he who did not reap receive wheat?" "He does not receive wheat", replied the farm hand. Hearing such an answer, the elder silently turned away. When the disciples begged him to explain his action, the elder said: "I did this with the intention to show you that he who has not lived a life of asceticism will not receive a reward from God."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the suffering of the entire people because of the sin of one man (**Joshua 7**):

1. How the Israelites were prohibited by God to take any of the possessions belonging to the conquered people of Jericho;
2. How one man took some of the possessions of the inhabitants of Jericho and because of this the Israelites were defeated by the Hai;
3. How even today, because of the transgressing of the law of God by one man, many suffer.

HOMILY

-About waterless wells-

"These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever" (2 Peter 2:17).

The apostle calls impure men "wells without water" those, **"that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (2 Peter 2:10). "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not" (2 Peter 2:12).** O "wells without water," which are adorned on all sides but you do not give water why are you then called wells when nothing comes out of you except thirst? O clouds and mist why do you bristle, as though you will flood the entire world, when there is not even one drop of water in you and when a breath of the Spirit of God will destroy and disperse you into nothing at that awesome hour? You are not concerned about purity, that is why you roll around in bodily impurity; neither are you concerned about order, that is why you detest authority; neither are you concerned about saving face [reputation], that is why you are presumptuous [self-willed]; neither are you concerned about knowing the truth, that is why you blaspheme that which you have not made any effort to understand. "The mist of darkness is reserved forever" for you. That is not God's will that is your will. God did not ordain that road, you yourself chose it. God is just and He will not commit a sin but will render to him according to his sin, and according to his unrepentant heart.

Brethren, what are physical desires except "wells without water" and dry clouds and mist? What type of fruit sprouts and blossoms from them except thistles and thorns, which do not require rain? Men with their physical desires are equal to their physical desires and they are blind because of these desires and will be judged according to them.

O Lord, Creator of our souls and bodies, give us the grace of Your Holy Spirit, that we may preserve our body and soul in purity and, in the day of judgment, may present both in purity to You, our Creator.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR CHRISTINA

Christina was born in the city of Tyre the daughter of Urban, the imperial deputy, an idol worshipper. The reason her parents gave her the name of Christina is unknown but it concealed the mystery of her future following of Christ. Until age eleven, she knew nothing of Christ. When she reached the age of eleven her father, in order to conceal her from the world because of her extraordinary beauty until she fully matured, designated the highest floor of a tall tower for her to live. All the comforts of life were afforded her; slaves were given to serve her, gold and silver idols were placed in her quarters so that she may offer daily sacrifices to them. However, in this idolatrous environment, it was difficult for the soul of young Christina. Looking out through the window each day at the sun and all the beauty of the world then, again at night, at the miraculous cluster of shining stars, Christina, through her own natural understanding came to the firm belief in the One Living God. The merciful God, seeing her longing for the truth, sent His angel who traced the sign of the cross upon Christina and called her the bride of Christ and completely instructed her in godly understanding. Christina then smashed all the idols in her quarters and provoked wild fury in her father. Her father brought her to trial and handed her over to be tortured and, after that, threw her into the dungeon with the intention to behead her the next day. That night Urban, completely healthy, parted from his soul and went to the grave before his daughter. After that two imperial deputies, Dion and Julian, continued to torture this holy virgin. Christina's courageous endurance and her miracles, which she worked by the power of God, converted many pagans of Tyre to Christianity. During the torturing of Christina, Dion suddenly fell dead in the midst of the people. Dion's successor, Julian, severed the breasts and tongue of Christina. The martyr took her tongue and threw it into Julian's face and he was instantly blinded. Finally her suffering for Christ ended by death beneath the sharp sword and her life continues in the immortal kingdom of the angels. Christina honorably suffered in the third century.

2. THE VENERABLE POLYCARP, ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Polycarp possessed "love toward God and his fellow men, joy because of an untainted conscience, peace because of victory over all passions, patience in time of temptation and misfortune, goodness in submission toward all, benevolence toward the poor, undoubting faith in fulfilling the commandments, truth in fulfilling his vows, meekness in not knowing anger, restraint and so forth." So well did he govern the Lavra of the Caves in Kiev that, after his death, a worthy successor among the monks could not be found (for those who were worthy did not want to accept the rank of abbot out of humility), so that the brethren were compelled to take Basil, a secular priest, as their abbot. St. Polycarp reposed in the Lord in the year 1182 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT CHRISTINA

Glorious martyr, the virgin Christina,
Of the Son of God, chosen bride,
Had in her father, the worst enemy
By him, was she torn apart by iron.
Daughter, the gods, if you do not acknowledge,
My daughter, will I not call you any longer.
Thus, the father said to the daughter: And to that the daughter replied:
For that, with you will I never be angry
The servant of Christ I am and you the servant of Satan.
Neither father nor friend in you do I see.
Daughter do not call me, happy that makes me,
The Lord is my father. My sweetness He is.
Infuriated beast the servants, the father ordered,
Her flesh to scrap that he her bones see!
From the tender body, the flesh fell,
All wound next to wound, nowhere flesh intact,
The holy martyr, a hand full of flesh grabbed
And in the middle of the profane face, struck the father:
O odious Urban, my flesh here it is,
Here beast, eat flesh of your own child!
That night, from his body Urban departed
And in Hades with the devil he united his soul.
Christina suffered and her blood shed,
Heroically she resisted against the world of enemies
Virgin Christina, martyr wonderful,
With the glory of the Son of God, glorified herself.

REFLECTION

The Faith of Christ mostly sanctifies and illumines the souls of men when the preachers of the Faith shine in their own lives. Blessed Polycarp, the abbot of the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev, was so completely illumined with the Faith of Christ, both in words and in deeds and in his entire being. Because of this, he had an unusual influence not only on ordinary people but also on princes and noblemen. Listening and seeing this godly man the Prince of Kiev, Rostislav Mstislavitch, became so illumined with the Faith of Christ and thus became so subdued and gentle, that he became a model of life in his immediate surroundings and to his entire people. During the Great Lenten Fast Season, Prince Rostislav received Holy Communion every Sunday and, in all places, sought out those who were in need and those less fortunate and helped them. In the end, he resolved to embrace the monastic order and spoke to Saint Polycarp about this: "Holy father, princely rule in this world cannot be without sin and it has already embittered me and has rendered me incapable." Polycarp answered him: "If you desire this monastic state from your heart, then let it be God's will." Once while in Smolensk, the prince became ill and close to death and ordered that he be quickly taken to Kiev, so that before his death he may receive the monastic tonsure. However he died before his wish was fulfilled.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous victory of the Israelites over the Haians (**Joshua 8**):

1. How the Haians pursued the Israelites and almost defeated them;
2. How, according to the command of God, Joshua raised the banner in the air and held it upraised, until the Haians were defeated;
3. How I should also in time of danger lift up my heart to God as a banner and with the cross and prayer in my heart walk to victory.

HOMILY

-About the holy apostolic warning-

"For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error" (2 Peter 2:18).

The holy apostle knows men better than the learned scribes for he is a saint and an apostle. A saint and an apostle penetrate deeply into the heart of man. About whom does the apostle speak? He speaks about the "impure, impudent and the self-willed", whom he earlier called **"wells without water and clouds and mist" (2 Peter 2:17)**. The "impure, impudent and self-willed" are men of many and high sounding [high falutin] words. They speak proud and false words to men. By these proud and false words, they both conceal and reveal their hearts concealing it for the uneducated and for those who do not understand and revealing it for those who are steadfast in the Faith and enlightened by Grace.

When the impure speak of their purity, by that they are declaring their impurity; when the impudent defends his character, by that he reveals his impudence; when the self-willed interprets the will of God, by that he shows his self-will. Whoever attentively follows his words can sense the stench of their bodily desires. The inattentive and uneducated cannot sense this stench but believe and are deluded. Those "who have just begun to escape" from the illusion of the body, the world and the devil are ensnared by proud and false words, as a fish in an invisible net. The fish does not know that it is in a net, until the net is pulled out on the hot sand. Then it knows but then it is too late. O may it not be too late for those pitiful souls of mankind who are ensnared in the net of proud and false words! Brethren know that every teacher who, by his teaching, condones bodily desires and who yields to sinners in bodily desires, is false.

Lord Jesus, Holy and All Pure, send Your Holy Angels to defend all beginners and fledgings in Your Faith from proud and false lips.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JULY - 25 -

1. SAINT ANNA, THE MOTHER OF THE ALL-HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD

Today is the commemoration of the falling asleep of St. Anna but her principal feast is celebrated on September 9, on which date is written her service and her hagiography. Anna was from the tribe of Levi and the daughter of Matthan, the priest. After a long and God-pleasing life she died in extreme old age.

2. SAINT OLYMPIAS, THE DEACONESS

Olympias was born in Constantinople of very distinguished parents. Her father, Anysius Secundus, was a senator and her mother was the daughter of the famous nobleman Eulavius who is mentioned in the hagiography of St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker. When Olympias reached maturity, she was betrothed to a nobleman who died before the marriage took place. The emperor and the other relatives pressured Olympias to marry another, but in vain. However, she refused them this and devoted herself to a god-pleasing life, giving from her inherited estate great offerings to the churches and alms to the needy. She served as a deaconess in the Church, at first during the time of Patriarch Nectarius and, after his death, during the time of St. John Chrysostom. When Chrysostom was exiled, he counseled Olympias to remain in the church and to serve as before regardless who the patriarch after him would be. Immediately after the banishment of this great saint, someone started a fire in the Great Church [The Church of the Divine Wisdom Hagia Sophia] and the fire consumed many prominent buildings in the capital. The enemies of Chrysostom accused this holy woman of initiating this malicious fire. Olympias was banished from Constantinople to Nicomedia where she died in the year 410 A.D., requesting in her testament that her body be placed in a box and cast into the sea and wherever the water tosses it up, there she is to be buried. The coffin was cast ashore in the city of Vrochthoi, where there existed a church dedicated to the Apostle Thomas. From her relics, great healing miracles appeared throughout the centuries. The exiled Chrysostom wrote beautiful letters to the exiled Olympias which, even today, serve as a great comfort to all those who suffer for the sake of God's justice. Among other things, Chrysostom writes to Olympias: **"Now I am very elated not only because you were relieved from infirmity, but more so, that you are nobly enduring all difficulties referring to them as trivialities which is characteristic of a soul full of power and abounding in the rich fruits of courage. For you not only courageously are enduring misfortune rather you do not even notice it when it comes and without exertion, without labor and disturbance not even talking about it to others but rejoicing and triumphing over it. That serves as the greatest wisdom"** (Letter VI).

3. THE VENERABLE FEMALE EUPRAXIA [EUPHRASIA], THE VIRGIN

Eupraxia was the daughter of Antigonos, a nobleman of Constantinople and a relative of Emperor Theodosius the Great. Her mother, a young widow, with Eupraxia settled in Egypt and visited the monasteries there distributing alms and praying to God. By her fervent desire, the seven-year-old Eupraxia was tonsured a nun. The older she got the more she imposed upon herself the heavy burden of mortification. At one time, she fasted for forty days. She reposed in 413 A.D, in her thirtieth year. She possessed the great grace of God and healed the most difficult illnesses.

4. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE FIFTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

This Council was convened in Constantinople during the reign of Emperor Justinian the Great in the year 553 A.D. All the heresies of the Monophysites were condemned at this Council as well as the heretical writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Origen (his teaching against the resurrection of the dead).

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT EUPRAXIA (EUPHRASIA)

Eupraxia, the young virgin,
For the sake of Christ, a hermitess became,
And boastful was of royal birth
But God-bearing was her soul.
All honors, as a burden she rejected,
And her royal lineage and riches.
Before God she prayed day and night,
By fasting and all-night vigils, herself exhausted.
To His servant, God harkened,
Tearful virgin Eupraxia,
Who many tears shed
And with tears inflamed prayers,
Upon her did God bestow wondrous gifts,
Both the young and the old to help,
Wicked demons to drive away,
Of every infirmity, heals the sick.
Before God, with a pure soul she came,
And for herself, in heaven found a home,
Built of faith and deeds,
And by much patience purchased.
With God Himself, that home glows,
Here, St. Eupraxia took up abode
To enjoy amidst eternal good
And to reign with the immortal Christ.

REFLECTION

"As virginity is better than marriage, so the first marriage is better than the second." Thus, St. John Chrysostom wrote to the young widow of Tarasius, a deceased nobleman of Constantinople, counseling her not to enter into marriage for the second time. The Church blesses first marriages with joy but the second marriage with sorrow. Eupraxia the elder, the mother of St. Eupraxia and relative of Emperor Theodosius the Great, remained a young widow following the death of her husband Antigonos, with whom she lived in physical contact for only two years and three months, and further lived one more year as brother and sister by mutual pledge. The emperor and empress counseled her to enter into marriage with another nobleman. She would not hear of it, but took her child Eupraxia and together they fled to Egypt. What can we say about St. Olympias and St. Eupraxia the younger? As with St. Macrina, not only was she also betrothed as a virgin but when her betrothed died, she considered herself a widow and would not even in her thoughts consider entering into marriage. What purity of heart! What fidelity to one's betrothed! What fear of God! What obvious faith in the future life in which the betrothed maiden hopes to see her betrothed.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous standing still of the sun and the moon (**Joshua 10**):

1. How Joshua, in order to complete the victory over the Gibeonites, ordered the sun and the moon to stand still in their courses;
2. How God heard the voice of the righteous man and by His power caused the sun and the moon to stand still;
3. How God created even nature to serve man and how God acts according to the will of the righteous.

HOMILY

-About slaves who preach liberty-

"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants (slaves) of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19).

The apostle still speaks of "the impure, the impudent, and the self-willed", reminding the faithful, to beware of their misleading "proud and false words". He first said about them that: "they speak evil of dignities of the glory of God" and second: **"that they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness" (1 Peter 2:18).** Now he further speaks about how they promise liberty i.e., they promise something which they themselves do not possess, for being overcome by impure passions, they are slaves to their own passions, submissive slaves to the greatest tyranny of this world. O my brethren, how relevant for us are these apostolic words written some nineteen hundred years ago! Behold, how everywhere around us they get carried away declaiming liberty, those who do not have even a little bit of liberty! Listen to the cry of the despairing slaves of passions and vices; how deceived, they are deceiving; how blinded, preaching light. Passions are a woven net, woven by the devil, to ensnare mankind. Captured in this net, they refer to other men as slaves and themselves as freemen to the laughter of the devil, who silently gathers in the net hauling it toward his shore. O brethren, guard yourselves from those desperate ones who call themselves the heralds of liberty, while they serve their master and lord, the devil, day and night. Their poverty they call wealth and the wealth of others they call poverty, as does the ignorant one calls the entire world ignorant and himself intelligent. Thus, those who are least free call others enslaved. Service to God and to fellow men out of love, they call slavery, while service to the devil, they call liberty. They are malicious both to God and to men, as is the devil himself malicious to God and to men. Whenever you hear anyone who speaks to you of liberty, question him well, as to whether he is not a slave of some passion or vice. By the impurity of their life, by their impudence and their self-will, you will recognize all false teachers of liberty. The apostle reminds you of this.

O Lord, the only Giver of true liberty, safeguard us from the net of all those who are malicious toward You and us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR HERMOLAUS

Hermolaus was a priest in Nicomedia during the reign of Emperor Maximian. He was among the two thousand martyrs whom the emperor condemned to be burned together with the church (December 28). Somehow Hermolaus, on that occasion, escaped death with two other priests, Hermippas and Thermocrates. Hermolaus baptized Saint Pantaleon with whom he was brought to trial, tortured and finally beheaded. Hermippas and Thermocrates suffered with them and all were crowned with the wreaths of victory and glory in the Kingdom of Christ. They honorably suffered about the year 304 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE FEMALE MARTYR PARASCEVA [PARASCEVE]

Parasceva was born in Rome of Christian parents and from her youth was instructed in the Faith of Christ. With great fervence, St. Parasceva endeavored to fulfill all the commandments of God in her life. Believing strongly and living according to her faith, Parasceva directed others on the path [of salvation] with the help of the True Faith and pious living. When her parents died Parasceva distributed all of her property to the poor and was tonsured a nun. As a nun she preached the Faith of Christ with an even greater zeal, not hiding from anyone, even though at that time the Roman authorities bloodily persecuted the Faith of Christ. First the pernicious Jews accused St. Parasceva of preaching the prohibited Faith. She was brought to trial before Emperor Antoninus. All the flatteries of the emperor did not help in the least to cause her to waver in the Faith. They then subjected her to fiery torments and placed a red-hot helmet on her head. The Lord miraculously saved her and Parasceva was delivered and left Rome. She again traveled from city to city to convert the pagan people there to the True Faith. In two more cities she was brought before princes and judges and was tortured for her Lord, at the same time working great miracles and by the power of God quickly recuperated from her pains and wounds. The pagans, as always, ascribed her miracles to magic and her power of recovery to the mercy of their gods. St. Parasceva once said to the prince who tortured her: "It is not your gods, O prince, who healed me but my Christ the True God." Finally Prince Tarasius beheaded her. Thus this saint gloriously ended her fruitful life. Her relics were later translated to Constantinople. She suffered honorably for Christ in the second century.

3. THE VENERABLE MOSES OF URGIN

He was at the court of the young Russian Prince Boris. When the godless Svyatopolk murdered Boris, Moses escaped and fled to Kiev. A little later he was taken to Poland as a slave by the Polish King Boleslav and there was sold for a thousand gold coins to a young and depraved widow, the wife of one of Boleslav's commanders who was slain. This wicked woman tempted Moses to commit adultery but Moses would not be tempted for he vowed to live chastely before the Lord. She then suggested marriage to him but he rejected that also. Moses secretly received the monastic tonsure from an Athonite monk and he appeared before the lady in the monastic habit. She bound him, ordered that he be flogged and to have his private organ severed. This unsuccessful seduction by this shameful woman lasted for five years - five years of pain and torture! However, King Boleslav was slain unexpectedly in an uprising during which this woman was also killed. Then Moses was free to go to Kiev where, at the monastery of St. Anthony, he devoted his life to prayer and silence. Completely conquering the shameful vice in himself, Moses assisted many to also be saved from it. His holy relics helped many (St. John, the much suffering July 8). After ten years of silence in the Monastery of the Caves, St. Moses found rest on July 26, 1043 A.D. and took up habitation in the eternal virginal Kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MOSES OF UGRIN

Purity before God, Moses vowed,
Free in the spirit, inspite of being shackled,
Replied to the rich and loathsome woman,
Shackled by passion, slave to debauchery:
What man until now, listening to a woman
Saved his soul conquered by passions?
Because of a woman, Adam had been expelled from Paradise
Because of Delilah, Samson was destroyed without splendor,
Solomon the all-wise, by a woman was seduced,
To idolatrous stupidity was lowered
Herod's head, by a woman was charmed,
The honorable head of the Forerunner John, beheaded.
God's servant I am O woman, leave me alone,
And for yourself, seek a companion throughout the world.
To your will, I will not submit,
With you in a bond, I see no happiness.
To be pure in body, this is a necessity O woman,
Before the Lord, that is my holy obligation.
Neither flattery, nor gold, nor your authority all
Neither mind nor body will lead me astray.
The Lord is Almighty, help me, He will
That my vows I will be able to honorably keep:
God is the God of purity, pure He created us
He wants us to be pure and, as pure, He saves us,
To a Christian O woman, purity is glory.

REFLECTION

Not one passion is conquered without a great struggle. The Holy Fathers have referred to adulterous passion as death. When the adulterer is saved from an adulterous passion it is as though he resurrected from the dead. For those who live in the world the passion of adultery is inflamed principally by seeing and for those who live a life of asceticism in the wilderness that passion is inflamed by thoughts and by imagination. Saint Sarah, a great female ascetic, was tortured by the insane passion of adultery for thirty years. She always defeated it by prayer and drove it away from her. At one time, the foul insanity of adultery came to her in bodily form and said to her: "Sarah, you have defeated me!" Sarah humbly answered: "I have not defeated you but the Lord Christ has defeated you." From that time on, the thought of adultery left her forever. When Saint Pimen was asked how can a man struggle against the adulterous insanity, he replied: "If man surpresses his stomach and tongue then he will be able to rule over himself." St. Anthony said that there exists three kinds of movements in the body: "First, the natural movement, second, unrestrained in food, and third, from the demons." Again, others have said that the vice of adultery is strengthened by anger and pride. However, all agree that along with man's sobriety and effort the help of God is necessary in order that this repulsive passion be uprooted completely. And that it is possible for man to preserve himself in purity, witness, among many others, St. Moses of Urgan, who lived fifty years in the world and ten years in the monastery, altogether a total of sixty years in completely virginal purity.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous victory over the Amorites (**Joshua 24**):

1. How God sent hornets against the Amorites and they all became confused and were defeated by the Israelites;
2. How mighty is the Lord God and how, with the help of little things, He destroys the prideful unjust ones.

HOMILY

-About the misfortune of those who come to Christ and then apostatize from Him-

"For if after they have escaped the pollution's of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them then the beginning" (2 Peter 2:20).

Brethren, bright is the sun but brighter still are the words of the apostle. Brethren, the sun illumines bodies but it cannot illumine souls, while the apostolic words illumine the souls. The apostle clearly sees the heights and depths of a soul and he illumines it for us out of fervent love, in order to lead us on the pure path of salvation. In a few words, he gives us two great instructions. The first instruction: one cannot flee from the impurity of this world in any other way except through the knowledge of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. First of all, without knowledge of the Lord Jesus one is unable to see or to know the impurity of this world, and second, man is unable to be cleansed from this impurity without the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. The second instruction: when man flees from the impurity of this world by knowing the Lord Jesus and, again, becomes entangled in it, then for him "the latter end is worse than the beginning." For knowing the light, he again returns into the darkness and the darkness becomes even darker, and, recognizing justice, he again sinks into injustice and his punishment is more severe; and recognizing holiness he again falls into beastliness and the animal is still more furious. The holy apostle does not hesitate to equate this turning back with a dog who returns to his own vomit and with the sow, who having been washed returns to wallow in the mire.

Whoever recognized the Lord Jesus Christ also recognized all that is needed for his salvation; he received a binocular to see the impurity, lies and injustice and received the power to flee from all of that. Therefore let him not turn back so that eternal death does not swallow him up. Let him not tempt God countless times. For if God was quick to save him the first time He will be slower the second time, and even slower the third time. My brethren, illuminating are the apostolic words.

O Lord Jesus, Savior, Almighty and All-Good, do not depart from us in the hours of our weaknesses and deliver us when the impurities of this world again draw us to themselves.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY AND GREAT MARTYR PANTALEON [PANTELEIMON]

Pantaleon was born in Nicomedia of a Christian mother and a pagan father. His mother was called Eubula and his father Eustorgius. As a young man he studied the science of medicine. The priest, Hermolaus, invited Pantaleon to be with him and taught him the Faith of Christ and baptized him. Pantaleon miraculously cured a blind man whom the other doctors treated in vain; he cured him by the power of Christ and baptized him. Out of envy the doctors accused Pantaleon of being a Christian and he went before the Emperor Maximian to stand trial. "He stood before the earthly king in body but in thought he stood before the heavenly King." Before the emperor, he freely declared that he was a Christian and, before the eyes of the emperor, he healed a paralytic of a long-standing illness. This miracle drew many pagans to the Faith of Christ. The emperor subjected him to torture but the Lord appeared to him on several occasions and delivered him whole and unharmed. Saint Hermolaus with Hermippas and Thermocrates were then martyred. Sentenced to death, Saint Pantaleon knelt for prayer. At that moment the executioner struck him on the neck with a sword and the sword broke as though it were made of wax. The executioner was unable to execute him until the saint completed his prayer and until Pantaleon told him to behead him. His relics possessed the ability to heal. Pantaleon was executed under an olive tree which, after that, became all adorned with fruit. PANTA LEON means, "all merciful" "all compassionate." The All-merciful God received his righteous soul and glorified him among His great saints. This wonderful martyr suffered honorably for Christ in his youth, on July 27, 304 A.D. Saint Pantaleon is invoked in prayers at the time of the "Blessing of Waters" and in the blessing of the holy oils used in the "The Sacrament of Holy Unction," together with Saint Hermolaus and the other unmercenary saints and wonder-workers. A most beautiful church dedicated to this saint is located on Holy Mount Athos.

2. SAINT CLEMENT, THE ARCHBISHOP OF OHRID

Clement was a disciple of Saints Methodius and Cyril. After the death of St. Methodius, Clement, under pressure by the Germans traveled from Moravia to the south. With Gorazd, Nahum, Sava, and Angelarius - together, they were called "The Numbers Five" - crossed the Danube river where they were guests of Emperor Boris Michael and following that came to the region of Ohrid. They first founded a monastery in Belica [Velitsa] where Clement's first episcopal see was located. Afterward, he settled in Ohrid and from there he developed his great arch-pastoral and illuminating work for the nearby and distant regions. In Ohrid, St. Clement erected a church to Saint Pantaleon. He had many disciples who copied books in the Slavonic script for the Slavic peoples. Saint Naum especially assisted him in this work. He worked miracles during his life and his relics manifeste a healing power until today. Following great labors and faithful service to God, he reposed peacefully in Ohrid in the year 916 A.D. His wonder-working relics repose in the former church dedicated to the Holy Birth-giver of God (The Theotokos) and later was renamed St. Clement.

3. BLESSED NICHOLAS, FOOL FOR CHRIST

Nicholas was from Novogrod and the son of wealthy parents. He left his wealth and as a "fool for Christ" ran throughout the streets and through his foolishness for Christ he instructed men. His companion, of the same mortification, was Blessed Theodore. Running one time in the presence of the people they both ran across the river on the surface of the water. Nicholas reposed in the Lord in the year 1392 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE FEMALE ANTHUSA

After a long ascetical life of solitude, Anthusa founded a convent of ninety sisters. At the time of the Iconoclastic controversy, under Constantine Copronymos, all ninety nuns were slain and after that, the Venerable Anthusa herself died in the year 759 A.D.

5. THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTY-THREE MARTYRS DROWNED IN THE SEA IN THRACE

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE FIVE IN NUMBER

(ST. CLEMENT, ST. NAHUM, ST. ANGELARIUS, ST. SAVA, ST. GORAZD)

The Five in Number, God's chosen ones,
Worthy bearers of the Evangelical honey,
Spread the Faith throughout the entire world
Until on the turquoise [sky blue] lake, they settled,
Yet with greater effort from there to labor
By the Lord to sweeten bitter human life.
Clement, hierarch, a true servant of God,
Who, much pain and ridicule endured,
He, from Ohrid, became Christ's banner,
With him, Saints Nahum, Angelarius, and Sava,
And Blessed Gorazd, five in number,
God's zealous laborers, all men of God.
In the heavens, for a thousand years they live,
For a thousand years, with them men are amazed.
The people they baptized, labor they did not regret,
With glory they were crowned, for God they loved.
The glory of the Five in Number, Ohrid preserves
The boast and glory of the Slavs, they are.

REFLECTION

If you give alms to the poor, know that as much as you do good works for your fellow man so much you do for yourself and even more for yourself. St. Anthony says: "Both life and death comes to us from our fellow man." St. Peter Damaskin writes: "As the poor should give thanks to God and love the rich who do them good, so even more should the rich should give thanks to God and to love the poor because they are saved by the Providence of God both now and in the future ages [life to come] because of their alms [Charity]. For without the poor, they not only cannot gain salvation of their souls but they cannot avoid the temptations of wealth." Alms which are given out of vanity or with disdain do not benefit anything. In earlier times, the wealthy ones brought gold to the hermits and begged them to accept it. It is a rare occurrence that the hermits gladly accepted alms and, when they did accept it, they accepted it out of compassion toward the wealthy ones giving it. The most destitute of men received alms out of compassion!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from Sisera and his might (**Judges 4**):

1. How the Lord showed mercy on the cries of the enslaved Israelites and gave them victory over Sisera;
2. How the prophetess Deborah sent a small force to Mt. Tabor against Sisera, who had nine-hundred chariots of iron and an enormous army;
3. How the forces of Sisera were scattered and he was slain.

HOMILY

-About the prophesied scoffers of holy things-

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (2 Peter 3:3).

Does the mirror change and bend when the scoffer stands before it laughing and scoffing at it? No, the mirror does not change and bend but remains the same as it was. Brethren, neither does God change or bend when scoffers laugh and scoff at Him. The unchanging and All-pure God knows that the scoffer scoffs at himself. By his scoffing at the holy things of God, the scoffer bends himself and makes himself hideous and the holy things of God remain intact.

O, how already in our times, in our days, many scoffers are already here! Many, too many but their multitudes are weaker than the One and Only One. What is a lot of dust before a strong wind? You have only to wait, to wait armed with patience until a strong wind blows.

Many and too many scoffers are already here, who scoff at God's word. They offer their own words in place of God's word; they offer the unholy in place of the holy, the putrid in place of the healthy, death dealing in place of life creating. The word of God is like a strong wind and their words are as dust.

The scoffers are already here, many and too many that scoff at God's works and still many more will arrive. They praise their works above God's works and say that the works of their hands are better and more comprehensible than the works of God. Their works are thievery; for all the good that they built, they built from God's materials and according to the likeness of God's buildings; and all the evil that they have built, they built from the devil's materials, and according to the likeness of the devil's buildings. Therefore, of what will the dust boast? With what will the scoffers praise today or tomorrow, when wild asses trample over their graves with their hooves?

All-pure Lord, Holy and Powerful are Your words, as a strong wind and holy are Your works, and there is no number or measure of them. All-pure Lord, save our tongues from scoffing and save our lives from the scoffers.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

JULY - 28 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES PROCHORUS, NICANOR, TIMON AND PARAMENAS

All four were numbered among the Seven Deacons and the Seventy Apostles. The remaining deacons were Stephen, Philip and Nicholas. Stephen, the first martyr, is commemorated separately on December 27 and Philip on October 11. Because of his heresy, Nicholas did not enter into the ranks of the saints. The first four do not have a separate day of celebration but are commemorated on this one day, July 28. Saint Prochorus was ordained by the Apostle Peter to be the bishop of Nicomedia. For a time he was in the service of St. John the Evangelist and, on the Island of Patmos, copied the Book of Revelation which he heard from the mouth of St. John. After that he returned to Nicomedia where he exerted much effort and labor to convert the people to the Faith. He died a martyr's death in Antioch where he was slain by unbelievers. Saint Nicanor suffered in Jerusalem the same day as St. Stephen the Arch-deacon and, soon after him, two thousand other Christians were slain by the wicked Jews. Saint Timon was a bishop in Arabia and suffered on the cross for Christ. Saint Paramenas died before the eyes of the apostles and was mourned and buried by them.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR JULIAN

During the reign of Emperor Antoninus, St. Julian crossed over from Dalmatia into Campania in Italy. He was a handsome young man and with his soul was completely devoted to the Lord. Enroute he met the soldiers of the emperor who were going out to arrest Christians. "Brethren, peace be to you!" Julian addressed them. By such a greeting and by the gentleness of the young man's countenance, the soldiers concluded that he was a Christian. To their question, Julian answered them: "I am a Christian born in Dalmatia." In addition, Julian openly admitted before them that he was traveling with the goal of converting idolaters to the One Living God. The soldiers beat him mercilessly and finally threw him into a pit where he remained for seven days without any human sustenance. An angel of God, who appeared to him, gave him heavenly food. Being brought to trial, Julian remained firm in the Faith as a diamond. Witnessing his courage and steadfastness in the Faith, thirty men converted to Christ the Lord. Sentenced to death, Saint Julian knelt and lifted up prayer to God, giving thanks to God for his martyr's mortification and begged Him to have mercy on all those who would honor his memory. He was beheaded and gave up his soul to God.

3. VENERABLE PAUL OF THE MONASTERY OF XEROPOTAMOU

Paul was the son of Emperor Michael Cyropalates. With an excellent education, with rare wisdom and at the same time combined with meekness, Procopius (as he was earlier called) was in his youthful years a subject of astonishment to all of Constantinople. In one of his charters, Emperor Roman the Elder, calls him "the greatest of all the philosophers." Being afraid that his soul would become proud, and that it not perish because of human glory, this handsome youth one day dressed in the rags of a beggar and came to Holy Mount Athos where he received the monastic tonsure from the illustrious Saint Cosmas. After enduring mortification of solitude, he restored the Monastery Xeropotamou and shortly after that build a new monastery of Saint Paul where he died in old age. When this monastery was consecrated, Emperor Roman sent a large portion of the Holy and Venerable Cross as a gift, which is preserved there even today. It is said of this saint, that he preached the Holy Gospel in Macedonia and in Serbia. He endured much torment from the wicked Emperor Leo the Armenian, the Iconoclast, and reposed in the year 820 A.D. Before his death, St. Paul said to the brethren: "Behold the hour comes which my soul has always desired and which my body has always feared."

4. THE HOLY MARTYR EUSTATHIUS [EUSTACE]

This martyr for Christ was a soldier in Ancyra. Brought to trial, he was not afraid of any tortures, but freely praised the name of the Lord Christ. Commander Cornelius ordered his feet to be drilled through and threaded with a rope and they dragged this man of God to a river and threw him into the river. Being saved by the power of God and healed of his wounds, Eustace appeared before the commander completely whole. When the commander saw him alive, he was so frightened that he took out his sword and stabbed himself. Eustace still lived for a while longer and died in the Lord in the year 316 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PAUL OF XEROPOTAMOU

The young Paul, the world highly glorified,
Therefore, the young crown-prince abandoned royalty
And royal glow, wealth and power,
And decaying opulence and intrigues of the city,
Fled from everyone, fled from everything,
Into the wilderness, where the saints hide
And their souls to save through austere mortification,
Day and night of praise, God, they glorify,
A place, Paul found on Mt. Athos
That from his soul creates he, a new dough,
That as in a child, his soul becomes,
And the essence of himself and the world to discover.
What Paul desired, that he accomplished,
On the laborious path, God helped him
His soul saved from passions destructive,
From the power of the demons, his soul saved;
With the Cross of Christ's Crucifixion, he baptized all
Both body and soul. And as a candle pure
Beautifully lighted from the love of God,
To the heavens he was lifted by the angels of God.
The young Paul because he abandoned the kingdom, God,
Greatly glorified him in the heavenly kingdom.

REFLECTION

Concerning kindness, St. Nilus of Mt. Sinai writes: "My son, always strive to be simple and kind. Do not have one thing in your heart and another thing on your tongue for this is a ruse and a lie. Be truthful and not false for falsehood is of the evil one. Do not return evil for evil but if someone does you evil, forgive him so that God may also forgive you. If you are tormented by the remembrance of evil thoughts, pray to God for that brother [the evil doer] with your entire soul and the remembrance of evil thoughts will flee from you." It is told how a young man decided to serve a very eccentric old man so that God would forgive him of his sins. He endured twelve years in this most difficult service and presented himself to God. A great spiritual man saw the soul of the young man in Paradise as he was praying to God for the evil old man: "Lord, as You had mercy on me because of him, have mercy on him according to Your great goodness and because of me Your servant." After forty days this eccentric old man died and, again, that spiritual man saw the soul of that old man reposing in the Kingdom of Heaven. What a most beautiful and miraculous kindness of this patient youth in truth, miraculous!

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous burning of the sacrifice on the stone (**Judges 6**):

1. How an angel appeared to Gideon and Gideon ran to bring bread and meat to offer hospitality to the angel;
2. How the angel touched the bread and meat with the top of the staff and a fire arose and burned the sacrifice.

HOMILY

-About the irrational questions of the irrational ones-

"Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Peter 3:4).

Thus ask the scoffers of the holy things of God. They who scoff at the words and works of God scoff at the promises of God. We the faithful say that the Lord will come and they scoff and say when will He come since He has not yet come? We say that the Lord promised to come and they scoff and say: "Where is the promise of His coming?" They say our fathers lived and died waiting for His coming and He did not come. Will we then still wait for Him, they say? Yes brethren, we wait for Him and we will wait for Him. He promised to come and He will come. The Holy apostle confirms the promise of the Lord; behold, he heard it from the lips of the Lord Himself, from the lips from which only truth proceeds. **"With the Lord, a thousand years is as one day" (2 Peter 3:8).** With these words the apostle seals the mouths of the scoffers and teaches us patience. Soon it will be two thousand years since the Son of God gave His promise that He will return again "in Power and in Glory" to save the faithful and to punish the unfaithful but He still has not yet come, so speak the scoffers. O ignorant scoffers, is two thousand years as long for God as it is for you? For do you not think that for Him two thousand years are as two days? Does He have to fulfill all of His promises in the course of two days? He, the Immortal One, is not in a hurry as you mortal ones are in a hurry. You are in a hurry for you will shortly die but He is Immortal and is not afraid of death. When He comes, He will find you in your graves. The trump of the angels will awaken you and you will rise, only to see that He is truthful and you will then be lowered into the dark kingdom of the slanderers, for you slander the Lord of Truth and drove Him into a lie. Brethren, the Lord does not want that we be inquisitive with regard to the day and the hour when He will come; He only wants that we believe that He will come. When He comes, be we dead or alive, we will see His coming. Is this not enough?

O Lord God, Our Savior, teach us patience and strengthen us in the Faith. You will come, we know.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR CALLINICUS

Callinicus was born in Cilicia. From his youth he was educated in Christian piety. Abandoning all, he went to preach the Holy Gospel. In Ancyra, a heathen Prince Sarcedos arrested him. When the prince threatened him with cruel tortures if he did not worship the idols, St. Callinicus answered him: "To me all pain for my God is most welcome as bread is to a hungry man." After cruel tortures and beatings, the prince placed iron shoes with nails protruding inside on his feet and ordered that he be driven into the city of Gangra for the prince was afraid to torture him anymore or to kill him in Ancyra for many, observing the heroic patience of this holy man, converted to the Faith of Christ. Along the way the soldiers became thirsty but there was no water. St. Callinicus prayed to God and brought forth water from a stone. When they arrived in the city of Gangra, the torturers threw St. Callinicus into a fiery furnace. The saint prayed to God saying: "I give thanks to you O Heavenly Father for making me worthy of this hour in which I die for Your Name." After that, he entered the fire. When the fire died down they found his body, whole and unharmed by the fire. He honorably suffered and was crowned with the wreath of eternal glory about the year 250 A.D.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR SERAPHIMA

Seraphima was a maiden from Antioch. She lived in the home of Sabina, the wife of a senator whom she converted to the Faith of Christ. Hearing about her Virilus, a persecutor of Christians, ordered that Seraphima be brought before him. Since Seraphima remained unwavering in her faith, Virilus ordered that she be thrown into prison and sent some young men to spend the night with her to defile her. Seraphima prayed to God in the prison when the young men arrived before the prison gates. Suddenly, an angel of God flashed before them with a fiery sword in hand and they fell as dead, completely unconscious and were rendered incapable. The next day, the persecutor begged Seraphima and she, through her prayer, restored the young men to consciousness. Ascribing all of this to magic, Virilus ordered that this holy virgin first be burned with candles and after that to be beaten with rods. While they were beating her, a piece of the rod fell off, deflected and struck Virilus in the eyes and he was blinded. Finally they beheaded this handmaiden of Christ and she gave up her soul to God. The pious Sabina honorably buried her body from which began to flow healing for many. St. Seraphima suffered during the reign of Emperor Hadrian between the years of 117-138 A.D.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR THEODOTIA

Theodotia was a young widow with three children. In Thessalonica, together with St. Anastasia (December 22), Theodotia labored in the work of God completely dedicated to a pious life. During the time of Diocletian's persecution, she was sentenced to death and, together with her children, was thrown into a fiery furnace. Their holy souls soared into the Heavenly Fatherland.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR EUSTATHIUS OF MTSKHETA

Eustathius was a Persian born in the village of Arbuket. At age thirty he came to the city of Mtskheta and seeing how Christians live and believe in Mtskheta, he received baptism. He was tortured for Christ and was beheaded in Tiflis in the year 589 A.D. His relics repose in the cathedral church in Mtskheta and give healing to those who believe.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SERAPHIMA

Seraphima, dear to the angels,
Completely innocent, both in soul and in body,
In all thoughts, kind,
Was tortured, many days
For Christ the Lord, the Immortal.
The godless prince, into the temple forced her
Sacrifices to the idols, to offer.
Saint Seraphima replied:
To the One God, I am a handmaiden,
Of the Holy Spirit my body is the temple,
In virginity, my body I preserved
That, as a sacrifice to God to offer.
The temple of the body, as a sacrifice to offer,
As much as it is dear to you, torture my body,
But, my soul you will never see dead,
The soul alive, before and after death
Be fire, by sword, destroy it you cannot.
Because of the soul, the body was created,
And by the soul, the body is blessed.
From God, the soul into the world appears,
That, in the body, the Lord it glorifies.
Glory to God, the Triune God!
Glory to God, my Creator!

REFLECTION

By true repentance with tears, prayer and good works the most defiled soul can be completely cleansed and changed. Therefore be careful that you do not maliciously mention the sins of a repentant sinner but offer thanksgiving to God and be astonished how from darkness, light is made and from slime, pure water. The Egyptian Pharaoh Amases was of lowly birth and when he became king, men respected him very little, remembering his origin. In order to outwit the people and to gain their respect, he took a metal basin in which, according to custom, the feet of the visitors to the palace were washed. He ordered the basin to be melted down and from it to make a likeness of a certain idol. The pharaoh then placed this idol on the street. Seeing this idol, the people began to worship it and to render it divine honor. Then the pharaoh revealed what this idol was made of. The people then understood that, by this, the pharaoh wanted to show that they need not think anymore about what he once was but what he is now. Then the people began to render the pharaoh the respect due to royalty.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous sign that God showed Gideon (**Judges 6**):

1. How the first night only the fleece was under the dew and the remaining ground was dry; and how the second night, all the ground was under the dew, and the fleece was dry;
2. How that first signified, the Israelites in the midst of the pagan world (until the coming of Christ) and after that the pagan world under grace and graceless Israel [Israel without grace] (after the coming of Christ).

HOMILY

-About the delaying of the Dreadful Day according to the mercy of God-

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness: but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Brethren, the mercy of God delays **"that day which burns like a furnace, according to the words of the Prophet Malachi" (Malachi 4:1)**. Therefore, let the scoffers be ashamed, who scoff at the promise of God and say: **"Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:4)**. God has not forgotten His promise but the sinners themselves have forgotten it. God, according to His immeasurable mercy, waits for the sinners to come to their senses, repent and to prepare themselves for that day which is not repeated. Behold that day is not like the many days which are given to men for the sake of repentance and to prepare for the encounter with God. That day is the only day and it differs from all other days, for it does not come for the sake of repentance but rather for judgment. Just as the Dreadful Judgment is only one and unrepeatable, thus is that day only one and unrepeatable.

God does not desire that any man be lost. He did not create man for death but for salvation. Is there a gardener who sows vegetables and desire that his vegetables dry out and perish? God is wiser and more compassionate than all men. God has only one desire, i.e., that all men repent and turn away from evil. How does the husbandman rejoice when his withered vineyard comes to life and again becomes green and brings forth fruit! How much more then is the joy of God and the angels of God when the souls of men, withered from sin, return and become young again from the tears of repentance and bring forth fruit of repentance.

O Lord, Merciful and Lover of Mankind, help sinners to sense Your mercy and Your pity toward them to sense and to repent to repent and to turn away from their wicked ways.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES SILAS, SILVANUS, CRESCENS, EPAENETUS AND ANDRONICUS

All were numbered among the Seventy Apostles. St. Silas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to settle the dispute between the faithful there regarding circumcision: namely, that it was not necessary to circumcise pagans when they convert to Christianity. **"Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole Church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren"** (Acts of the Apostles 15:22). After that, Silas traveled with Paul throughout Asia and Macedonia and was appointed as the bishop in Corinth, where he peacefully died.

St. Silvanus assisted both of the Chief Apostles. **"By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand"** (1 Peter 5:12).

"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, Who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea" (2 Corinthians 1:19). As the bishop of Thessalonica, Silvanus labored much and suffered much until he finally exchanged this earthly life for the heavenly life.

St. Crescens was a companion of the Apostle Paul and after that the bishop in Galatia and a missionary in Gaul, where he died as a martyr for Christ during the reign of Trajan. **"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia"** (2 Timothy 4:10).

St. Epäenetüs is mentioned by the Apostle Paul. He was the bishop in Carthage. **"Salute my well beloved Epäenetüs, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ"** (Romans 16:5).

St. Andronicus, the bishop of Pannonia, is commemorated separately on May 17. **"Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me"** (Romans 16:7).

2. THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR VALENTINE

Valentine was the bishop of the Italian City of Interamna. He cured the brother of the Roman tribune, Frontanus, of an illness. When Cherimon, the son of the renown philosopher Craton, took ill and at the advice of Frontanus, Craton summoned Bishop Valentine to Rome. Cherimon was completely crippled, so that his head was bent over between his knees. Valentine closed himself off in a room with Cherimon and spent the entire night in prayer. The next day he brought Cherimon out completely cured and handed him over to his father. Then Craton with his entire household and three of his disciples, was baptized. Cherimon left the home of his father and went with Valentine. Also baptized at that time was Abundius, the son of the Roman eparch. Enraged at this, the eparch arrested Valentine and after much torture he was beheaded. Also beheaded at this time were those three disciples of Craton: Proclus, Abibus and Apollonius. Their bodies were taken by Abundius and he buried them with honor. They all suffered in the year 273 A.D. and became citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR POLYCHRONIUS, BISHOP OF BABYLON

When Emperor Decius overran Babylon, he captured Polychronius with three presbyters, two deacons and two baptized princes, Eudin and Senis. Polychronius did not want to respond before the emperor and remained silent, while St. Parmenius, the presbyter, spoke on behalf of all. The emperor took the bishop and priests to Persia, to the city of Kordoba, and there they were beheaded. The princes, Eudin and Senis, were taken with them to Rome and there, at first, they were thrown to the wild beasts and later slain by the sword. They all suffered honorably in the year 251 A.D.

4. SAINT JOHN THE SOLDIER

John was secretly a Christian. He was sent by Emperor Julian the Apostate to slay Christians but he did not kill them rather assisted them to hide. Julian cast him into a prison in Constantinople. When the evil Emperor Julian was slain, John gave himself over to a life of asceticism, living in purity and holiness. He died peacefully in old age. After his death, he appeared to some who needed his help. Prayers directed to St. John help to seek out robbers.

5. THE VENERABLE MOTHER ANGELINA

Angelina was a Serbian Princess [Despotica]. Her relics repose in the Monastery Krusedol (December 12).

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT POLYCHRONIUS

The pagan ruler, the terrible Emperor Decius,
In fury cried out: O Polychronius,
Why do you not honor the gods of Rome, O Elder?
Royal commands, why do you not want to hear?
But the saint remains silent, nothing does he speak.
Again the emperor asks him and the saint does not speak.
This man is a mute! Decius concluded.
Our father is not a mute, Parmenius said,
Does not want to speak but keeps his mouth pure,
Keeps his mouth pure according to the command of Christ:
Do not cast your pearls before swine,
Do not give to the dogs; divine things!
The saint keeps the pearl, keeps it in himself,
So as not to soil his mouth speaking to you.
Decius infuriated as never before in his life,
Ordered that Parmenius' tongue be severed.
They severed his tongue. But to him, what does that mean
The speech of the saint became more beautiful and stronger?
That, the Lord battles for His zealous servants.
Keeps them from shame and the mockery of men.

REFLECTION

One needs to distinguish a sinner from a penitent. If you have taken upon yourself the role to rebuke the sinner, guard yourself well, that you do not rebuke the penitent also. How dear the repentant sinner is to God, call to mind the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Therefore, let it be very dear for you, he who has become dear to God. At one time it happened that a monk succumbed to sin for which he was banished from the monastery. This monk went to St. Anthony, confessed his sin, repented and remained with Anthony for a period of time. Then Anthony sent him back again to the monastery but they did not receive him and, again, they banished him. Again, the penitent came to Anthony. Again, Anthony sent him back to the monastery with a message to the fathers of the monastery: "One boat experienced shipwreck and lost its cargo; with great difficulty did that boat arrive in the harbor and you wish to drown even that which was saved from drowning!" Hearing this wise message, the fathers received with joy the penitent brother into the monastery.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous victory of Gideon over the Midianites (**Judges 7**):

1. How Gideon gathered thirty-two thousand soldiers and set out against the Midianites;
2. How God commanded him to reduce the number, so that the Israelites would not brag about themselves and say that they defeated [the Midianites] and not God;
3. How Gideon selected only three hundred soldiers and defeated the Midianites who were numerous **"as grasshoppers" (Judges 7:12).**

HOMILY

-About the coming of the Dreadful Day of the Lord-

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

Dreadful is the day of the Lord, O how inexpressibly dreadful! Dreadful because of its inexorable justice and also because of its unexpectancy. The Lord Himself commanded: **"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour" (St. Matthew 25:13)**, and the apostle who, with his own ears, heard these words only repeats them. He who is afraid of thieves watches every night, so that the thief would not surprise him. He, who is afraid of the Day of the Lord, watches every day and every hour in order that that day and that hour would not unexpectedly catch him in sin. We are so accustomed to the correct rotation of the course of time, and on the correct passage of day and night, that we do not suspect the approaching noise of that day which will overshadow all days and hold back the wheel of time and smash its tiny spokes. So also will it be when the sun places its fiery face over millions of wax candles and blots out their glow and melts their wax. Dreadful, dreadful, dreadful is the Day of the Lord! When that day places its fiery face over the candles of today's day, these will be snuffed out and darkened, "the heavens shall pass away with great noise," the heavens, by which the present average days are counted, "and the elements shall melt with fervent heat" the material elements, the earth, water, air and fire will disintegrate. They will cease to be. Everything will be new. Our earthly homeland and all works on it will be burned up. They will cease to be. Everything will be new. All our works will burn up; when God does not have pity on His works, would He then pity our works? God will not seek works but workers. All workers will appear before Him for judgment and their works He will burn up. And all will be new. Who will be judged, will be judged; who will be rewarded, will be rewarded, for all eternity. Brethren, dreadful, truly dreadful is the Day of the Lord! Dreadful because of its unexpectancy and dreadful because of the inexorable justice of God.

O Just Lord, make us sober and vigilant! Command Your holy angels to keep us in sobriety and vigilance, so that sin does not inebriate us and cause us to sleep.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT EUDOCIMUS

Eudocimus was born in Cappadocia of devout parents, Basil and Eudocia. At the time of the Emperor Theophilus (829-842 A.D.), Eudocimus was a young officer in the army. Even as an officer, he exerted all effort to live according to the commandments of the Holy Gospel. Preserving his purity undefiled, he avoided conversing with any woman, except his mother; he was merciful toward the misfortunate and needy, conscientious in reading holy books and more conscientious in his prayers to God. He avoided vain gatherings and verbosity. "Among the throngs and worldly vanity, he was a lily among thorns and as gold in the fire." Because of his unusual good works, the emperor appointed him as the commander of Cappadocia. In this high position, Eudocimus strived to be just before God and before men. According to the Providence of God he died at an early age, in his thirty-third year. His relics were found to possess healing properties. An insane man touched his grave and immediately became whole; a child also touched his grave and was made whole. After eighteen months, his mother opened his coffin and found his body as though it were still alive, without any signs of decay or corruption. A wonderful aroma emitted from the body of the saint. His relics were later translated to Constantinople and buried in the new church of the Holy Theotokos which the parents of this righteous Eudocimus built.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR JULITA

Julita was from Caesarea in Cappadocia. She had a dispute with her neighbor over some property. The neighbor went to the judge and reported that Julita was a Christian which, at that time, meant the same thing as being outside the protection of the state. St. Julita gladly denied her property rather than her faith. But even after that, the evil pagans did not leave her in peace but tortured her and finally burned her alive in the year 303 A.D. Thus, this follower of Christ sacrificed her estate and her body for the sake of the eternal salvation of her soul.

3. SAINT JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

The noble Joseph, a wealthy man and member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, was secretly a follower of Christ. **"Now when it was evening, there came a certain rich man of Arimathea, Joseph by name, who was himself a disciple of Jesus" (St. Matthew 27:57). "Now after these things Joseph of Arimathea, because he was a disciple of Jesus (although for fear of the Jews a secret one), besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus" (St. John 19:38).** Together with Nicodemus, Joseph removed the body of Christ from the cross and placed it in his sepulchre. Because of this, he was shackled by the Jews and thrown into prison. But the resurrected Lord appeared to him and convinced him of His resurrection. After that, the Jews released him from prison and banished him from the fatherland. He went throughout the world to preach the Holy Gospel of Christ, and that "good news" he brought to England where he reposed in the Lord.

4. SAINT JOHN THE EXARCH

John was a distinguished Bulgarian priest and theologian during the time of Emperor Simeon (892-896 A.D.). He translated the "Six Days" by Basil and the "Exposition of the Orthodox Faith" by John Damascene into Slavonic. He died peacefully in the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Joseph a noble and rich man,
Of Christ the Crucified, (he) did not scandalize,
But when the sun darkened and the earth shook,
He to Pilate went and brought him news
That the Lord died, the Life-giving Lord,
The secret disciple thus became public.
When the public one hid, the secret became public,
Thus Joseph the wise, in a day became famous.
And together with Nicodemus, the body of Christ
In his garden in a new tomb placed it.
The Jewish spies heard, reported it,
The righteous Joseph in chains they placed.
In the darkened dungeon, Joseph languished
While his Lord in Hades glowed.
Joseph pondered his remembrance of Christ,
Mentioning his miraculous works,
Miracles and words and prophecies many,
Before Him, he stood in the presence of God,
And now darkness everywhere from without and within,
Dark days, nights, evenings and mornings
After a glowing flash, than the sun, more radiant,
O desperate darkness, darker than Hades!
But behold suddenly in the dungeon dawned:
The Resurrected One appeared to the shackled servant.
O Joseph brave and noble
Neither of the Resurrected One did you scandalize.
About the dead Christ, you to Pilate informed
And recognized and glorified the Resurrected One.
Let the land of Britain honorably glorify you,
You, for her, planted the first seed of salvation.

REFLECTION

Ascetics in the wilderness labor to sever their will and to live according to the will of God. Some erroneously think that the hermit lives completely in isolation. Not one hermit thinks thusly. He lives in the company of God, angels of God and the departed saints who have found repose in the Lord. Wherever the mind of man is, there also is the life of the man. The mind of the hermit is among the greatest, the most pure and in the most numerous company in which one man can possibly be. One time, Abba Mark remarked to St. Arsenius the hermit: "For what reason do you flee from our company and of conversation with us?" Arsenius replied: "God knows that I love you all but I cannot be both, together with God and with man. In heaven, thousands and thousands of thousands have but one will and, with men, there are many and various wills. That is why I cannot leave God and be with men."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the punishment of God which befell Abimelech and the Shechemites (**Judges 9**):

1. How Abimelech with the help of the Shechemites slew seventy of his brethren;
2. How Abimelech himself, after that, slew the Shechemites and plowed under the city, sowing it with salt;
3. How Abimelech, after many victories, was killed by a woman who, from a tower, cast a piece of a millstone on his head;
4. How the curse of Jotham, the son of Gideon, came upon the Shechemites and Abimelech.

HOMILY

-About the last awaiting-

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14).

Brethren, what is our last awaiting? In the night we await the day and in the day we await the night and again the day and again the night. But this awaiting is not our last awaiting. Brethren, what is our last awaiting? In joy we tremble waiting for sorrow and in sorrow we wait with hope for joy and again sorrow, and again joy. But not even these awaitings are our last awaitings. Brethren, our last awaiting is the awaiting of the Judgment of God. When the judgment of God comes, the Dreadful Day **"which burns like a furnace" (Malachi 4:1)**, then we welcome all that we deserve; a day for some, without change into night, and night for others, without change into day; joy for some without change to sorrow and sorrow for others without change to joy. Brethren, that is the last awaiting of the human race, whether he knows it or does not know it, whether he thinks about it or does not think about it.

But, you faithful should know this and you should think about this. Let this knowledge be the zenith of all your knowledge and let this thought direct all your other thoughts. In the knowledge and contemplation of this, include that which is even most important, include your diligence "that you may be found of Him in peace without spot and blameless" (or still more correctly translated: pure and blameless). Be diligent to be pure in mind and in heart, correct in your conscience and in peace with God. Only in that way will the last awaiting not frighten you with unexpectedness, nor will it hurl you into the night without day or into sorrow without joy. As everything else in the life of the Lord Jesus was a surprise for man, thus will be His Second Coming unexpected, in power and in glory. Unexpected was His birth by the All-holy Virgin, unexpected was His poverty, unexpected also was His miracle-working and every word and humiliation and voluntary death, the resurrection, the ascension, the Church and the spreading of His Faith. Unexpected will be His Second Coming, unexpectedness more frightful than all other unexpectednesses.

O Lord, O righteous Judge, how will we meet You, unclad in purity and blameless even in peace? Help us, help us that however much as possible we may prepare for the dreadful encounter with You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST

AUGUST -1-

1. THE SEVEN MACCABEES, THEIR MOTHER SOLOMONIA AND ELEAZAR THE PRIEST

They all suffered for the purity of the faith of Israel under King Antiochus, called by some "Epiphanos," the "enlightened one" and by others "Epimanis" the "insane one." Because of the great sins in Jerusalem and especially the vying over priestly authority and crimes committed during the occasion of this struggle, God permitted a great calamity on the Holy City. After that, Antiochus wanted by any means to impose upon the Jews the idolatry of the Hellenes in place of their faith in the one living God and he did everything toward this goal. Assisting Antiochus in his intention were some treacherous high priests and other elders of Jerusalem. On one occasion, King Antiochus himself came to Jerusalem and ordered that all Jews eat the meat of swine, contrary to the Law of Moses, for eating pork was an apparent sign that one has disowned the faith of Israel. The elder Eleazar, a priest and one of the seventy translators of the Old Testament into the Greek language [the Septuagint] would not partake of pork. Because of that, Eleazar was tortured and burned. Returning to Antioch, the king took with him the seven sons called the Maccabees and their mother Solomonia. The seven Maccabean brothers were called: Avim, Antonius, Eleazar, Gurius, Eusebon, Achim and Marcellus. Before the eyes of their mother, the wicked king tortured the sons, one by one, ripping the skin from their faces and, afterward, casting them into the fire. They all bravely endured torture and death but they did not disown their faith. Finally, when the mother saw her last son, the three-year old in the fire, she leaped into the flames and was consumed in the fire rendering her soul to God. They all suffered honorably for the faith in the one living God about one hundred eighty years before Christ.

2. THE PROCESSION OF THE HONORABLE CROSS

This feast was instituted by a mutual agreement of the Greeks and Russians at the time of the Greek Emperor Manuel and the Russian Prince Andrew in commemoration of the simultaneous victories of the Russians over the Bulgarians and the Greeks over the Saracens. In both of these battles, crosses were carried by the armies from which heavenly rays shone. It was therefore instituted that, on August 1, the Cross be carried first to the middle of the Church of the Divine Wisdom [Hagia Sophia] and after that, along the streets for the people to venerate as a commemoration of the miraculous help of the Cross in previous battles. This was not an ordinary cross but the true Honorable Cross which was kept in the church of the imperial court. On July 31, the Honorable Cross was carried from the imperial court to the Church of the Holy Wisdom of God and from there it was carried along the streets for the consecration of the earth and the air. Finally, on August 14, it was again returned to the church of the imperial palace.

3. THE NINE HOLY MARTYRS

The names of these martyrs were: **Leontius, Attus, Alexander, Cindeus, Mnesitheus, Cyriacus, Menaecus, Catunus and Eucleus.** Leontius was a carpenter and the others were farmers. Because of their bold confession of the Faith of Christ and because of their destruction of the temple of Artemis, they were cruelly tortured and beheaded in Perga of Pamphylia during the reign of Diocletian and became heirs of the Kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HONORABLE CROSS OF CHRIST

**The Honorable Cross of Christ
Before it, all honorably prostrate,
By the power of the Cross of Christ
From temptation, we are redeemed.
The Holy Cross is mightier than the demons
And from every earthly king,
From sickness, the Cross saves
And from the assaults of barbarians.
Prince Andrew, by the power of the Cross
Enslaved lands, saved,
King Manuel, by the power of the Cross
The Saracens, gloriously destroyed.
From the armies of pagans,
From the tyrannical conquerors,
From all evils demonstrated that
The power of the Cross is mightier.**

REFLECTION

A weak man usually protects himself by hypocrisy and the strong man protects himself by tyranny. That no man can defend his life before God either by hypocrisy or by tyranny is clearly shown to us by the example of the holy elder Eleazar and King Antiochus. When the tyrannical king brought Eleazar to trial and compelled him to eat pork if he desired to save his life, Eleazar adamantly rejected that. Then some of Eleazar's friends handed him a piece of other meat, not swine's meat, begging him to eat that in the presence of the king and the people in order to safeguard both his life and his conscience. The elder refused this offer saying to his friends: "Hypocrisy is not becoming to me an old man to the scandal of many young people." The elder Eleazar was slain in the body but he saved his soul. The punishment of God came upon the tyrannical King Antiochus while he was still living. A dreadful disease from within overcame him and his body swarmed with worms and the stench from his body spread afar. In his despair, the king remembered the shedding of the innocent blood of thousands and thousands of human beings who, by his order, were unmercifully murdered and, frightened of God, he began to confess the one God whom, before that, he persecuted by persecuting His faithful ones. However, heavenly mercy did not manifest itself on him.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the punishment of God upon Israel (**Judges 10**):

1. How the Israelites committed that which was evil before the Lord, worshipping the Syrian, Sidonian and Moabite idols and others;
2. How the Lord handed them over in bondage to the Philistines who, for eighteen years, trampled upon them and crushed them;
3. How dreadful is the Lord toward apostates from the true Faith.

HOMILY

-About prophetic visions-

"The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos" (Isaiah 1:1).

He who has understanding can know the one and true God. He, who is without understanding, let him listen to the one who understands and the one who understands and the other [who listens] will be saved. It is possible to clearly know God from created nature and still more clearly, from the inspired men of God and most clearly from the Lord Christ. The inspired men of God before Christ were the prophets. Among the first was Isaiah, the son of Amos. The Spirit of God opened his sight and he saw that which other men did not see. That is why he called his message to his people "a vision" [or apparition]. How the prophets saw the heavenly mysteries and the mysteries of future events cannot be described: that can only be experienced by those to whom God gives that gift.

The visions of the holy prophets are true, for those words and those heavenly appearances from these visions, have actually been confirmed later on. They are true because they served for the good of men, turning them from evil to good. Furthermore, they are true because the prophets fearlessly declared them without regard of the suffering which befell them and even without regard for the bitter death which many of them suffered.

What did Isaiah receive from the world and from men for his visions? Riches or honor or an exalted calling? The Jews sawed him in half! This is the riches, this is the honor and this is the glory of the prophet to suffer for the truth of God!

Therefore, let us listen to the prophets of God for they are the paths that lead to the city of the Great King; they are the rays of the Sun of Righteousness Christ which on a distant sphere illumines men with the heavenly light, pointing out the Sun to them.

O Lord Christ, Who revealed Yourself through the prophets and prepared the way for Your descent into our valley, help us. Help us to recognize Your light and Your providence in Your holy prophets.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 2 -

1. THE FINDING AND THE TRANSLATION OF THE RELICS OF ST. STEPHEN, THE ARCHDEACON AND PROTO-MARTYR

When the wicked Jews slew St. Stephen by stoning, they left his body for the dogs to consume. However, God's Providence intended otherwise. The martyr's body lay in an open place at the foothill of the city for one night and two days. The second night Gamaliel, Paul's teacher and secretly a disciple of Christ, came and removed the body and took it to Caphargamala on his estate and there he honorably buried it in a cave. Gamaliel also buried his friend Nicodemus who died weeping over the grave of Stephen in the same cave. Gamaliel also buried his baptized son Abibus there and according to his will, was buried there also. Since that time, many centuries passed and no one living knew where the body of St. Stephen was buried. However, in the year 415 A.D. during the reign of John, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Gamaliel appeared three times in a dream to Lucian, the priest at Caphargamala and, at length, related everything to him concerning the burial of all the afore-mentioned showing him the exact spot of their forgotten graves. Excited by this dream Lucian informed the patriarch and with his blessing went with a group of men and exhumed the four graves. Gamaliel had already told him in the dream whose grave was which. A strong sweet-smelling fragrance from the relics of the saints permeated the entire cave. The relics of St. Stephen were then solemnly translated to Zion and honorably buried there and the relics of the remaining three were moved to a hill above the cave and were placed in a church. That day, many healings of the sick occurred by the relics of St. Stephen. Later on, St. Stephen's relics were translated to Constantinople. Thus the Lord crowned him with much glory who, for His Name, shed his blood.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR STEPHEN, THE POPE OF ROME AND OTHERS WITH HIM

Stephen was Pope of Rome between the years 253-257 A.D. He struggled against the heretic Novatian. He cured Lucilla, the daughter of Nemesius, the tribune and baptized them both. Stephen, with twelve of his clerics, suffered during the reign of Valerian. He was beheaded during the celebration of the Liturgy.

3. THE HOLY AND BLESSED BASIL, "FOOL FOR CHRIST" OF MOSCOW

Basil's father was named Jacob and his mother Anna. At age sixteen, he dedicated himself to a life of asceticism as a "Fool for Christ" and in this difficult mortification persevered for seventy-two years. Altogether, he lived to be eighty-eight years old. He traveled barefooted, bareheaded and in rags. He did not have any permanent dwelling place. He admonished sinners, reprimanded the noblemen, prophesied the truth and had visions of distant places. Having suffered greatly from hunger, frost and from the insults of men, Blessed Basil presented his holy soul to God. Tsar Ivan, with the Metropolitan, attended his funeral. He is buried in Moscow in the Church of the Most-holy Birth-giver of God, later named after him.

HYMN OF PRAISE

GAMALIEL

In the middle of the dark night, Gamaliel appeared,
To Lucian the wondrous mystery revealed;
Gamaliel appeared, elder dignified,
A hidden smile on his radiant face,
A long gray beard and gray are his hairs,
His garment white, with a red cross adorned.
And Gamaliel, four hives placed
In a cave, along side four graves.
Three were of gold, the fourth of silver,
Each one, with beautiful flowers, was filled.
The first was full of red flowers,
The remaining three with white [flowers] from the Spring of Paradise.
That golden hive, Gamaliel said,
With flowers red, from which a fragrance flows,
Before the grave of Saint Stephen, that one stands,
Who, for the Living Christ, shed his blood.
And the other two golden ones, with flowers all white
With holy Nicodemus, I, Gamaliel share
Here, his body and here, my body
And the fourth one pure white silver
And with flowers white, here, Abibus rests,
My only son, whom alive, I see.
His hive is white and his flowers are white.
For a pure soul and body, had he,
Baptized and young he died, as an early bloom,
My son I buried, along side Saint Stephen
For the saint, my son Abibus, to help
As he helps every Christian.

REFLECTION

We must be patient and merciful toward the sinner if we wish that a long-suffering [patient] God be merciful to us. The great compassion of Blessed Alexander, the Patriarch of Antioch, had become proverbial. One of his scribes stole several gold pieces and fled to Thebaid. However, some robbers captured him in the wilderness and they took him with them. Learning of this, Alexander sent the robbers eighty-five gold pieces as a ransom. That is why it was said: "The mercy of Alexander cannot be overcome by any sin." St. John the Merciful One writes: "The long-suffering [patience] of God is unchangeable and His mercy is kind...How many criminals are there who go out to kill and rob that He conceals in order that they may not be captured and placed under tortures? Pirates sail the sea and God does not order the sea to drown them. How many falsely swear by Holy Communion and He tolerates not repaying them for that with evil? Robbers steal on the road and He does not give them over to the beasts to tear them to pieces...Libertines go off with prostitutes and He tolerates them. Why all of this? Because He waits for repentance and conversion. Truly, God does not want the destruction of a sinner...That is why, brethren, let us be ashamed before the most lenient Lord God."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate God's miraculous assistance to the repentant Israelites (**Judges 11**):

1. How the penitents cry out to God: do with us whatsoever You please, only deliver us now (**Judges 10**);
2. How the Spirit of the Lord descended upon Jephthah and he destroyed the Ammonites and liberated Israel;
3. How, even today, repentance of men brings peace with God and brings down the help of God in danger.

HOMILY

-About God's grievance against the unfaithful people-

"Hear, O heavens and listen, O earth, for the Lord speaks: sons have I raised and reared but they have disowned me!" (Isaiah 1:2).

The wrath, wrath of God! God turns from the chosen people in wrath and grieves to His other creations; He grieves to the heavens and the earth. Harken my holy and rational angels and harken all you irrational earthly creatures! I wanted to make this people holy and rational and they have lowered themselves beneath irrational creatures with their impurity and ungratefulness. I have called them my sons and exalted them and they turned their backs on me and went after foul idols. Wrath, wrath of God, the wrath of Love, that even a thousand times does good to a leper and that even a thousand times was spat upon by the leper. When and if all the elements could speak, they could, with all the living things, witness all the great miracles which the One Living God performed for the people of Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness, only that they turn away from idolatry and believe in the One Living and Almighty God. This could be attested by water and blood, by stone and wood, by darkness and fire, by frogs and flies, by birds and serpents, by sickness and death and clouds and smoke, by winds and manna, and copper and iron together with pharaoh and the countless numbers of peoples miraculously defeated by the hand of God and removed from the path of the people of Israel. But still, they turned from God and went after idols.

This is the dreadful vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of God. O, my brethren, just imagine what kind of vision the Prophet Isaiah would have concerning us if he would appear today among our people!

O Lord, the only living, the only Omnipotent, affix our mind and our heart to You the true God and safeguard us; safeguard us from apostatizing from You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 3 -

1. THE VENERABLES ISAAC [ISAACIUS,] DALMATUS [DALMATIUS] AND FAUST [FAUSTUS]

Venerable Isaac is celebrated again separately on May 30. At first, St. Dalmatus was an officer during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great whom the emperor held in great esteem. When the spirit awakened in him, he despised all earthly things, resigned his rank and took his only son Faust and, with him, went to the community of St. Isaac in the outskirts of Constantinople where they both were tonsured as monks. Dalmatus was completely devoted to a god-pleasing life for which the elder Isaac rejoiced. When Isaac approached the hour of death, he appointed Dalmatus as abbot in his place. Later, this community was named after him - the so-called Dalmatus. Dalmatus devoted himself to fasting, at times for forty days. By fasting he conquered the invisible demonic power. He participated in the Third Ecumenical Council [Ephesus 431 A.D.] and fought against the Nestorian heresy. Pleasing God, he died peacefully in the fifth century. His son Faust supported his father in everything and, after a God-pleasing life, died peacefully in this Dalmatus community.

2. VENERABLE COSMAS, THE EUNUCH

Cosmas was a monk from the Pharan Lavra. He was well versed in Holy Scripture. So much did he value the words of St. Athanasius the Great that he said to his disciples: "Whenever you hear any word from the books of St. Athanasius and, if you have no paper, write it down on your handkerchief." In his old age, Cosmas came to Antioch to Patriarch Gregory (+584 A.D.) and there ended his life. The patriarch ordered that the body of Cosmas be buried in the monastery of the patriarchate. A man frequently came to the grave of Cosmas, honoring the saint and prayed to God there. Asked why he did this, he revealed that he lay paralyzed for twelve years and that St. Cosmas had healed him.

3. VENERABLE ANTHONY, THE ROMAN

Anthony was born in Rome in 1086 A.D. of devout and wealthy parents. At that time, the Roman Church separated from the Eastern Church and all who remained faithful to the Eastern Church were persecuted by the Roman clergy. Among the persecuted was Anthony. He distributed all of his inherited wealth and was tonsured a monk. Anthony lived a life of mortification by standing on a rock in the sea for fourteen months. Meanwhile, the rock separated from its base and by miraculous providence sailed the waters to Novgorod. In Novgorod, Archbishop Nicetas received him kindly and helped him build a church to the Holy Birth-giver of God, later to become a monastery. Anthony lived a long time as the abbot of this monastery and manifested the great power of grace through many miracles. He died peacefully in the year 1146 A.D. and took up habitation in the mansions of the Lord.

4. SAINT SALOME, THE MYRRH-BEARER

Salome was the mother of the Apostles James and John, the wife of Zebedee and the daughter of Joseph, the betrothed of the All-Holy Birth-giver of God. She served the Lord during His earthly life and was deemed worthy to be among the first to proclaim His resurrection.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE ANTHONY OF NOVGOROD

A lifeless rock and a man on the rock,
The turbulent sea, around it foams
Anthony, in God, engrossed
His mind, to God, ceaselessly raised
And prayers, with the heart, ascended.
The rock moved and Anthony remains silent,
Completely in God, about evil, does not suspect,
Frightened are all evils, before a hero
But mostly, before a true monk.
Man, by Providence, is directed
And, through the saints, God glorifies Himself.
Through Anthony, God is glorified,
Anthony, as a star, shown
In the great city of Novgorod,
Where, to the people, a miracle was proclaimed.
Anthony nourished humility,
His mind to God, ceaselessly raised,
Humble soul, to God a sweet sacrifice,
And prayer the incense of true sacrifice,
Anthony, both incense and sacrifice
A dead saint, God never saw
As the discerning saint neither saw God [as dead].

REFLECTION

Holy souls read Holy Scripture with great diligence concentrating on every word and placing themselves before the mirror of the Word of God as before the Dread Judgment. Their diligence was so great in this that some of the ascetics undertook distant journeys in order to come to a spiritual sage who would interpret for them a word or a saying from Holy Scripture. Whenever it was possible, this was accomplished through correspondence. It is from this that a complete collection of the letters of the saints remained [survived] such as those of Saints Basil, Gregory, Chrysostom, Isidore of Pelusium, Nilus of Sinai and many others. One day St. Cosmas pondered on the words of the Lord Christ when He, in the Garden of Gethsemane, asked His disciples whether they had a sword. When His disciples said to Him: **"Lord, behold, here are two swords. And He said to them, it is enough" (St. Luke 22:38).** Being unable to explain these words himself, St. Cosmas decided to cross over the wilderness to the distant Lavra called Pirga to the illustrious Abba Theophilus to inquire of him. With great difficulty did St. Cosmas succeed to reach his goal. Theophilus explained to him: "The two swords signify the two-fold order of a god-pleasing life: deeds and visions, i.e., labor and awakening of the mind to godly thoughts and prayer. Whoever has both of these, he is perfect."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the ingratitude of the Jews toward God the Deliver and on God's punishment (**Judges 13**):

1. How the sons of Israel again did that which is wicked before the Lord;
2. How the Lord handed them over into the hands of the Philistines for forty years;
3. How the ungratefulness of a liberated people toward God the Deliver, even today, is punished by bondage under foreigners.

HOMILY

-About human ingratitude unseen even among the animals-

"The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:3).

The ingratitude of man is most strongly exposed by the gratitude of animals. When the irrational ox knows who his master is and when the ass knows from whose crib it is fed, how then can rational man not know about God, His Creator and Nourisher? The word Israel means "one who sees God." And every rational man should by his rationality be "one who sees God", to know God, to feel the presence of God and to serve God as once did the meek and wonderful Jacob. But when rational man, whose entire dignity is in the knowledge of God, does not know God, i.e., when the "one who sees God" becomes blind toward God, then the dignity of the ox and the ass is raised in dignity above such a man. For an ox, without exception, recognizes his master and the ass, without exception, recognizes the one who feeds him while among men there exists exceptions, i.e., there exist men and, very often leaders of men, who do not recognize their Lord nor their Nourisher. In all of created nature, godlessness is a disease only among men for godliness is the condition of normality and health only for men and not for animals. Thus, godlessness is not the disease of animals but of men; alas, only of men, only they who are destined to be "ones who see God" and who, when they lose their godliness, become poorer than the ox and the ass.

This is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the Prophet of God.

O God of meek Jacob, of Israel, enlightened one "who sees God", help us to maintain our human dignity, the dignity of one "who sees God" and that in every day and every hour, we may know and recognize You with gratitude, as our Lord and Nourisher.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE SEVEN HOLY YOUTHS OF EPHEBUS

There was a great persecution of Christians during the reign of Decius. The emperor himself came to Ephesus and there arranged a boisterous and noisy celebration in honor of the lifeless idols as well as a terrible slaughter of Christians. Seven young men, soldiers, refrained from the impure offering of sacrifices and they earnestly prayed to the one God to save the Christian people. They were the sons of the most influential elders of Ephesus and their names were Maximilian, Jamblichus, Martin [Martinian], John, Dionysius, Exacustodianus, and Antonin [Antoninus]. When they were accused before the emperor, they retreated to a hill outside Ephesus called Celion and there they hid in a cave. When the emperor learned of this, he commanded that the cave be sealed off. However, God according to His far-reaching Providence caused a miraculous and long-lasting sleep to fall upon the young men. The imperial courtiers, Theodore and Rufinus, secret Christians, built in that wall a copper sarcophagus with lead plaques on which were written the names of these young men and their martyr's death during the reign of Emperor Decius. More than two hundred years then passed. During the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Younger (408-450 A.D.), there was a great dispute about the resurrection. There were some that doubted the resurrection. Emperor Theodosius was in great sorrow as a result of this dispute among the faithful and prayed to God that He, in some way, would reveal the truth to men. At that time of turmoil in the Church some shepherders of Adolius, who owned the hill Celion began to build folds for the sheep and removed stone after stone from that cave. The youths then awakened from their sleep young and healthy, the same as when they fell asleep. The news of this miracle was spread abroad on all sides so that even Theodosius himself came with a great entourage and with delight conversed with the youths. After a week, they again fell into the sleep of death to await the general resurrection. Emperor Theodosius wanted to place their bodies in gold sarcophagi but they appeared to him in a dream and told him to leave them in the earth as they were laid out.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR COSMAS, "EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES"

Cosmas was born in Aitolia in the village of Megadendron (Large Tree). As a young man he went to Mount Athos where he was tonsured a monk in the monastery Philotheus. However, driven by a constant desire to preach the Holy Gospel to the people, Cosmas went to Constantinople where he implored the blessing of Patriarch Seraphim II. He visited the regions of the Danube preaching the Good News but remained mostly in Albania where he suffered at the hands of Kurt Pasha whom the Jews incited against Cosmas. The Turks strangled Cosmas and his body was tossed into the river in the year 1779 A.D. His miracle-working relics repose in the village of Kalikontasi in the church of the Holy Theotokos not far from the town of Berat. Cosmas suffered for his Lord in the sixty-fifth year of his life.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE SEVEN HOLY YOUTHS OF EPHEBUS

When the last rays of the sun turned the west bloody red,
Seven Youths, to God prayed,
That, on the morrow again find themselves alive and healthy,
Before Emperor Decius, brought forth to torture
And lay down to sleep a long dream a deep dream,
Time walked by a wide step
One morning, from the east, the sun dawned
And the Seven from their deep sleep awakened.
And Jamblichus the youngest, to Ephesus hurried
To see, to hear, about everything he inquired
Does Decius, even them, seek to slaughter
And bread to buy for the Seven of them.
But behold, what kind of miracle: this is not the gate!
And even the town is totally different!
Everywhere, beautiful churches, domes, crosses,
Jamblichus asks himself: are those not dreams?
Nowhere a familiar face, nowhere kinsmen,
There are no persecutions; there are no martyrs.
Tell me brethren, the name of this town,
And tell me the name of the emperor, who now reigns?
Thus Jamblichus inquires. The people, at him, look,
And about him, everyone judges differently.
This town is Ephesus, now and before,
In Christ, reigns Emperor Theodosius
This Antipater [The Consul] heard and [Martin] the graying bishop,
The entire town was perplexed,
Everyone, to the cave hurries.
And saw the miracle, glorified God,
And the resurrected servants of Christ the Resurrected One.

REFLECTION

"Ask and it shall be given to you," said the Lord (St. Matthew 7:7). As parents give to their children all that the children ask and all that is for their benefit, so does God, the Lover of Mankind, give to men all that men ask of God and what serves to their salvation. As a monk on Mt. Athos, Cosmas asked two things of God: to preach the Gospel to the people and to suffer as a martyr for the Faith. For an Athonite monk, who is bound by vows to his monastery, these two desires seem unattainable and unrealistic. But to God, everything is possible. God perfectly fulfilled both desires of Cosmas. The joy of Cosmas was indescribable when he received the blessing of the patriarch that he could leave Mt. Athos and go among the people to preach the Good News. Cosmas had one more similar moment of joy and, that was when the servants of the Turkish Pasha informed him that, according to the command of the Pasha, he must die.

Full of joy, the saint sank to his knees, gave thanks to God that He fulfilled even this desire and gave up his body to death and his soul to the Living God.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous announcement of the birth of Samson (**Judges 13**):

1. How an angel of God appeared to Manoah and his barren wife and announced that his wife will give birth to a son, who will deliver the people from slavery;
2. How for this, Manoah offered a sacrifice to God and an angel, in the flame of the sacrifice, ascended to heaven;
3. How even a barren woman can give birth when God wills it.

HOMILY

-About the sickness of apostasy-

"The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint" (Isaiah1:5).

Brethren, God, the God of Sabaoth, is the source of health. Go out to the heights of God, you whose heads are troubled by superfluous works and still more by superfluous concerns and be imbued with health which comes from God, only from God. A sick head those are the leaders and the elders of the people and a faint heart- those are the people. The prophet presents an entire people as one body and shows how even with the body of a people, the same thing happens as with body of a man, i.e., when one organ of the body is sick, then only that organ is sick, but from the sickness of this one organ, the entire body feels faint. So it was with the people of Israel: the head was sick and from a sick head, the heart is faint. The leaders and the elders of Israel abandoned the law of God and followed their senses as their guides. Their sensual mind, tarnished, overly tarnished from the various worldly influences, they took as their direction for a correct life instead of the law of God. They fell into the hopeless darkness of idolatrous errors. And from the insanity of the head, the heart was faint. It is more difficult for the heart to separate from God than it is for the head, it is more difficult for a people to separate from God than their elders, but when the head remains sick for a long time, than the heart is faint and yields. From corrupt leaders, even a people finally stray from the path.

This is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the true prophet. Indeed, a true vision, both for then and for now, for the people of Israel and for the people of today. Brethren, look at the people whom you know best and you alone judge, is the head sick and is the heart faint? O Lord, true and just, enlighten the head of every people with Your light and strengthen with Your might the heart of every people, so that our enemies will not rejoice and say that You have abandoned us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR EUSIGNIUS

Eusignius served as a soldier under Emperor Maximian, Emperor Constantine the Great and under Constantine's sons. He was present during the torturing of the holy female martyr Basiliscus [May 22]. He saw myriads of angels and the Lord Jesus Himself as He received the soul of this holy martyr from the angels. Eusignius fought under Emperor Constantine and saw the Cross which appeared to the emperor. He served in the army for sixty full years and during the reign of Constantine's sons resigned from military service and settled in Antioch, the place of his birth. There, he lived a god-pleasing life in fasting, prayer and good works. During the time of Julian the Apostate, two men who were arguing on the street asked him to be their judge. He dispensed justice to the correct one and the man at fault became angry and went to the emperor and accused Eusignius of being a Christian. The emperor summoned Eusignius to court but he strongly denounced the emperor for his apostasy from the Faith and reproached him with the shining example of Constantine the Great. The enraged Julian ordered that he be beheaded. Eusignius was martyred at a ripe old age in the year 362 A.D. and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR FABIAN, POPE OF ROME

Fabian was a Roman by birth. At first, he was a village priest and, after that, during the election of a pope, when a white dove descended upon him, he was chosen pope. Fabian was meek and kind. With great diligence, he gathered the bodies of the holy martyrs and buried them with honor and built churches over their graves. In the same manner, he built shrines and chapels in the caves where the martyrs hid during the time of bitter persecution. He baptized Emperor Philip and his son Philip, the heir to the throne and, with the help of the baptized senator Pontius, destroyed many idols and idolatrous temples. When the wicked Decius was crowned emperor, a terrible persecution of Christians began during which St. Fabian suffered and was beheaded in the year 250 A.D. This holy Fabian established the custom of consecrating Holy Myron [Chrism] on Holy and Great Thursday.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR PONTIUS, THE SENATOR

Pontius was the son of Senator Marcus and his wife Julia. The barren Julia conceived after twenty-two years of marriage and gave birth to Pontius. He was baptized by Pope Pontian along with his friend Valerius, his biographer, and succeeded to convert his father Marcus, the Emperor Philip with his son and many other distinguished Romans to the Faith of Christ. As a senator, he greatly protected and assisted the Church and was a good friend of Pope Fabian. When the persecution began under Decius, Pontius escaped from Rome and hid in the foothills of the Alpine mountains [Cimella Cimez, France]. During the reigns of Valerian and Galiena he was captured and subjected to harsh tortures during which many miracles of God were manifested and many converted to Christ. There happened to be many Jews there who cried out to the judge: "Kill him, kill him immediately, this magician." To this, St. Pontius raised his hands to heaven and said: "I thank You my God that the Jews even cry out against me as their fathers did once cried out against Christ: 'Crucify Him, crucify Him.'" Pontius was beheaded in the year 257 A.D. and was buried by his friend Valerius.

4. SAINT NONNA

Nonna was the mother of St. Gregory the Theologian. As a Christian, she possessed powerful and miracle-working prayer. By her prayer to God, she converted her husband from heathen stupidity to the Christian Faith. Her husband Gregory later became a bishop in the town of Nazianzus. By prayer Nonna saved her son Gregory the Theologian from a storm. She died peacefully as a deaconess in the year 374 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR PONTIUS

Pontius, with his companion Valerian, walked,
But, with sorrow, his heart was overcome.
His father, a senator, his mother also a senator,
But, a bitter enigma, torments his soul;
All worldly wisdom, a fable, to him seemed,
O, where is truth? Truth, he asked for.
Thus, both walked, absorbed in thought
At eventide, along side a Christian church;
Into the church entered and beheld glowing,
Beheld glowing and heard chanting:
Of silver and gold, the gods of the people are
And eyes, have they blind as mud, are they
And ears, have they deaf as a rock are they,
And mouths, have they but the mouths are mute.
Weaker than oneself, the weak ones created,
That is why their creator, as such will also be
And all of them in order, that to them bow down
And foolishly hope in lifeless things
Two sorrowful young men, two slaves of the idols,
Heard these words, both trembled,
Then, the image [icon] of Christ, approached,
To the honorable priest, entrusted their hearts,
What the truth faith is, the priest told them,
And idolatrous service, what it is: vacuous and bloody.
Into the church entered, two young noblemen,
Renown and respected throughout the city of Rome,
Into the church entered, sad and sorrowful,
From the church departed, radiant and joyful.

REFLECTION

This is how Valerian begins the biography of his companion, St. Pontius: "Who can believe, if God does not grant it? Who can lead a life of asceticism, if the Lord does not help? Who can receive the wreath of martyrdom, if Christ does not give it?" God can do all and God wills all that is for the salvation of men, if only men pray to Him. By prayer, St. Nonna converted her husband Gregory and her son, Gregory the Theologian, to Christianity. By prayer, Monica brought Augustine back from a wayward life to the path of good works and faith. By prayer, St. Basil converted his teacher Evulios. By prayer, King Hezekiah prolonged his life for fifteen years. By prayer, St. Simeon the Stylite turned back the Persians and Scythians that they not attack the land of Greece with an army already prepared. Furthermore, all the stars in the heavens will be more readily counted than all the miracles worked on earth by prayer.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous strength of Samson (**Judges 14**):

1. How the Spirit of the Lord came upon him so that he was able to tear lions apart with his hands and to snap the rope by which he was bound and slew many Philistines;
2. How the Spirit of the Lord withdrew from him [Samson] when he confided the secret of his strength to a heathen woman [Delilah] and was then slain [**Judges 16**].

HOMILY

-About how God whitens the repentant sinners-

"Though your sins be like scarlet, they may be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

O, the boundless mercy of God! In His greatest wrath upon the faithless and ungrateful people, upon the people **"laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters" (Isaiah 1:4)**, as **"princes [rulers] of Sodom" (Isaiah 1:10)** and upon the people who have become as the **"people of Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:10)** - in such wrath, the Lord does not abandon mercy but rather calls them to repentance. Just as after terrible lightnings, a gentle rain falls. Such is the Lord long-suffering [patient] and full of mercy and **"neither will He keep His anger forever" (Psalm 103:9)**. Only if sinners cease to commit evil and learn to do good and turn to God with humility and repentance they will become "white as snow." The Lord is mighty and willing. No one, except Him, is able to cleanse the sinful soul of man from sin and, by cleansing, to whiten it. No matter how often linen is washed in water with ashes and soap, no matter how often it is washed and rewashed, it cannot receive whiteness until it is spread under the light of the sun. Thus, our soul cannot become white, no matter how often we cleanse it by our own effort and labor even with the help of all legal means of the law until we, at last, bring it beneath the feet of God, spread out and opened wide so that the light of God illumines it and whitens it. The Lord condones and even commends all of our labor and effort, i.e., He wants us to bathe our soul in tears, by repentance to constrain it by the pangs of the conscience to press it, to clothe it with good deeds and in the end of ends, He calls us to Him: "Come now," says the Lord, **"and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18)**. That is, I will look at you and I will see if there is Me in you and you will look upon Me as in a mirror and you will see what kind of person you are.

O Lord, slow to anger, have mercy on us before the last wrath of that Dreadful Day.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

In the third year of His preaching, the Lord Jesus often spoke to His disciples of His approaching passion but at the same time of His glory following His suffering on the Cross. So that His impending passion would not totally weaken His disciples and that no one would fall away from Him, He, the All-wise, wanted to partially show them His divine glory before His passion. For that reason, He took Peter, James and John with Him and, with them, went out at night to Mt. Tabor and there was transfigured before them: **"And His face shone as the sun and His garments became white as snow" (St. Matthew 17:2)**. There appeared along side Him, Moses and Elijah, the great Old Testament prophets. And, seeing this, His disciples were amazed. Peter said: **"Lord, it is good for us to be here: if You will, let us make here three tabernacles; one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (St. Matthew 17:4)**. While Peter still spoke, Moses and Elijah departed and a bright cloud overshadowed the Lord and His disciples and there came a voice from the cloud saying: **"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear Him" (St. Matthew 17:5)**. Hearing the voice, the disciples fell to the ground on their faces as though dead and remained that way, lying in fear, until the Lord came near to them and said: **"Arise and be not afraid" (St. Matthew 17:7)**. Why did the Lord take only three disciples on Tabor and not all? Because Judas was not worthy to behold the divine glory of the Teacher, Whom he will betray and the Lord did not want to leave him [Judas] alone at the foot of the mountain so that the betrayer would not, by that, justify his betrayal. Why was our Lord transfigured on a mountain and not in a valley? So as to teach us two virtues: love of labor and godly-thoughts. For, climbing to the heights required labor and height represents the heights of our thoughts, i.e., godly-thoughts. Why was our Lord transfigured at night? Because, the night rather than the day is more suitable for prayer and godly-thoughts and because the night, by its darkness, conceals all the beauty of the earth and reveals the beauty of the starry heavens. Why did Moses and Elijah appear? In order to destroy the error of the Jews, as though Christ is one of the prophets; Elijah or Jeremiah or some other that is why He appears as a King above the prophets and that is why Moses and Elijah appear as His servants. Until then, our Lord manifested His divine power many times to the disciples but, on Mt. Tabor, He manifested His divine nature. This vision of His Divinity and the hearing of the heavenly witness about Him as the Son of God, should serve the disciples in the days of the Lord's passion, in strengthening of an unwavering faith in Him and His final victory.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

There, where Israel defeated Sisar
There also condescended, the Heavenly King
Prayer, to go and to nightly vigils,
The glory of His Transfiguration, to manifest,
And the faith of His followers, to confirm
In the eternal victory of Him the Victor.
There, divine light from Himself, He released
Dispels the thick darkness, and illuminated Tabor;
The Light, for a long time, which in Himself contained
From which, to the world, a little at a time dispensed
Abundant rays, now released,
Jubilant rays, sweet rays.
The glow of humanity, to reveal to heaven,
To earth and to men, the Divine Truth.
Let the firmament, its Representative see,
Let the earth recognize God, the Savior.

REFLECTION

Why did our Lord not manifest His divine glory on Tabor before all the disciples instead of before three of them? First, because He Himself gave the Law through the mouth of Moses: **"At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15)**. Therefore, three witnesses are sufficient. These three witnesses represent three main virtues: Peter Faith, for he was the first to confess his faith in Christ as the Son of God; James Hope, for, with faith in the promise of Christ, he was the first who laid down his life for the Lord, being the first to be slain by the Jews; John Love, for he reclined on the bosom of the Lord and remained beneath the Cross of the Lord until the end. God is not called the God of many but rather the God of the chosen. **"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6)**. God often valued a faithful man more than an entire nation. Thus, on many occasions, He wanted to destroy the entire Jewish nation, but because of the prayers of righteous Moses, spared that nation to live. God listened more to the faithful Prophet Elijah than to the entire unbelieving kingdom of Ahab. Because of the prayers of one man, God towns and people. Thus, the sinful town of Ustiug was to be destroyed by fire and hail had it not been saved by the prayers of the one and only righteous man in it, St. Procopius, the "fool for Christ" (July 8).

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Providence of God, which rewarded the virtue of Ruth and Boaz (The Book of Ruth):

1. How Ruth, being left a widow, remained faithful to Naomi, her aged mother-in-law and, by her labors, fed both, Naomi and herself;
2. How the wealthy Boaz was merciful and helped these two poor women;
3. How Boaz and Ruth entered into marriage from whom was born Obed, the father of Jesse, who was the father of David.

HOMILY

-About the exaltation of the Church of God-

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it" (Isaiah 2:2).

This prophecy pertains to the Church of Christ. However much of this prophecy could seem to be mysterious to the Jews before Christ, so much more is it completely clear for us today. Mountain or height: the house of the Lord is truly established "in the top of the mountains", i.e., in the heights of the heavens, for the Church of Christ, first, is not sustained by the earth but rather by the heavens and finally, one part of the members of the Church (and now, a greater part) is to be found in heaven, while the other part is still on earth.

Further, the Church of Christ is "exalted above the hills", i.e., above all earthly and human greatness. Human philosophy and art and all the cultures of people as well as all earthly values represent only the low hills in comparison to the infinite heights of Christ's Church. For it was not difficult for the Church to create all of those hills, while neither one of them, nor all of them together, in the course of many thousands of years, was able to create the Church.

Finally, the prophet says: "all nations shall flow into it." To what, truly, up to now, have all the nations flowed if not into the Church of Christ? The Temple of Jerusalem was inaccessible to the Gentiles under the penalty of death. The Church, however, from the beginning called all nations on earth, obedient to the command of the Lord: **"Go ye therefore and teach all nations" (St. Matthew 28:19).**

This is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, a vision from afar, a vision truthful and wonderful.

O Wonderful Lord, we give You unceasing thanks that You have made us worthy to be the children of Your Holy and True Church that is exalted above all the worldly heights.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 7 -

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYR DOMETIUS

Dometius was born in Persia as a pagan during the reign of Emperor Constantine. He became acquainted with the Faith of Christ as a young man, abandoned paganism and was baptized. So much did Dometius love the True Faith that he left everything worldly and was tonsured a monk in a monastery near the town of Nisibis. He lived for some time among the brethren and then withdrew to a life of silence to be with an a certain elder Archmandrite Urbel, about whom it is said that he did not eat anything cooked for sixty years. The elder Urbel ordained Dometius a deacon and when he wanted to compel him to receive the rank of a priest, Dometius withdrew to an isolated mountain and settled in a cave. He attained such a high degree of perfection through fasting, prayer, all night vigils and godly-thoughts that he cured the sick. When Julian the Apostate came to those regions, he heard of Dometius and sent men, who sealed him alive in the cave along with two of his disciples. Thus, this saint of God died and took up habitation in the Kingdom of God in the year 363 A.D.

2. THE VENERABLE OR, HERMIT OF THEBAID

Or attained great perfection through the greatest mortification. When he firmly established himself and attained holiness in solitude, he then gradually established several monasteries and was a superb spiritual leader and teacher of many monks. Rufinus, who visited him describes Or in the following way: "In his dress [habit], he resembled an angel of God; a ninety-year old elder with a long beard, as white as snow; externally was very pleasant. His gaze shone with something super human." Often times, he saw the angels of God. He especially endeavored never to speak an untruth. He had great temptations from the demons but overpowered them all soberly and courageously. He received Holy Communion daily. On one occasion, one of his disciples reminded him that the Feast of the Resurrection had come and that it should be celebrated. Hearing this, Or came out, raised his hands to heaven and spent three days in prayer without rest. He explained to his disciple: "For the monk, this is the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ: to elevate his mind and to unite it with God." He rested in deep old age about the year 390 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS MARINUS AND ASTERIUS

Marinus was a soldier and Asterius was a Roman senator. At the time of Emperor Gallienus, St. Marinus served as a soldier in Caesarea in Palestine. Marinus was beheaded for the sake of the Faith of Christ. Asterius, the senator, also a Christian, was present at his martyrdom. He removed his dolman and, with it, wrapped the body of the martyr, placed it on his shoulders, took it and honorably buried it. Seeing this, the pagans beheaded him also. They both died honorably for Christ about the year 260 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE PIMEN, [POEMEN] THE GREATLY AFFLICTED ONE

Pimen was sickly from his youth and from his youth desired the monastic life. Brought to the Lavra of the Caves in Kiev for healing, he remained there until his death. Pimen prayed to God, more for sickness, than for health. At night, angels appeared to him and tonsured him a monk. On that occasion, the angels informed him that he will be ill until his death and, just before his death, will become healthy. And so, it was. Pimen was bedridden for twenty years. He worked miracles during his lifetime and was unusually discerning. Just prior to his death, he rose from the bed completely whole and immediately prepared a grave for himself. He rested in the Lord in the year 1110 A.D.

5. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR NARCISSUS, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Narcissus was beheaded at the time of Antoninus in the year 213 A.D. being one hundred sixteen years of age.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT OR, HERMIT OF THEBAID

To the monks, honor; to the monk's glory,
Head of the monks, Or, the all-wise Abba,
With great labor, with many sighs,
Of a true monk, reached perfection.
Teach us a lesson, they once pleaded to him!
Never tell a lie, speak the truth.
I know a man, who never swore,
Never lied, never wished evil to another.
Then the elder after his reply, remained silent.
Then holy Sisoës asked of Or:
Tell me father some instruction.
"Live," Or said to him, "as you see me!"
Tell me more clearly, how should I see you.
Everyman, a secret within himself conceals?
Again Or said to him: Behold, to you I am speaking:
Of all God's things, myself I consider the worse.
Paul, the disciple, Or taught thusly:
For from every sin you will easily flee
But only from evil conversation, if you flee,
For from this evil, every other sin sprouts
To the soul of a man, evil conversation is death,
Every good seed in the heart, it smothers.
One more thing will I say and let it be enough,
The thoughts of vanity, drive away; insane desires, drive away,
From that which is material, distance yourself,
And son, the spiritual you will attain.

REFLECTION

Neither concern yourself about the righteous nor envy the sinner. Remember always that the Lord Christ, by His resurrection, conquered a shameful death and that Herod, Judas, Nero, Julian the Apostate, Valerian, Leo the Armenian and other opponents of Christ, by a shameful death mortalized forever their temporary successes and victories. Envious ones slandered St. Narcissus the Patriarch for violating his chastity. The innocent Narcissus withdrew into the wilderness and spent many years in silence and patiently waited for God to do His will. Three patriarchs followed him [on the patriarchal throne] and only then did men come forward and clearly prove his innocence. Then everyone forced him to return from the wilderness to his throne. Thus, God justifies the righteous. The bloody Emperor Valerian, with satanic passion, murdered Christians throughout the entire world [Roman Empire]. How did he end up? In battle with the Persians, he was defeated and enslaved by King Sapor. Sapor did not desire to kill him immediately but used him as a mounting block whenever he wanted to mount a horse. Every day, King Sapor's servants brought Valerian along with a horse and Sapor enjoyed placing his foot on the neck of the Roman Emperor in order to make it easier for him to mount the horse. He who sows an evil seed reaps an evil harvest.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the mercy of God toward the barren Hannah, the mother of Samuel (**1 Samuel 1 1 Kings 1**):

1. How Hannah was barren and in her sorrow implored God that she give birth to a son, promising to dedicate him to God;
2. How God heard the prayers of Hannah and she gave birth to a son and called him Samuel (besought from God);
3. How Hannah brought Samuel to the Temple and dedicated him to God.

HOMILY

-About the new law from Zion-

"For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

The prophet speaks of a new law and of a new word. The old law was given on Sinai and the new law will come from Zion. The old law was given through Moses and the new law, the Lord Christ Himself will bring. That [the old law] was intended in the beginning only for the Jews, and this one [the new law], will be directed to all peoples and all of mankind. Even though these words of the prophet are clear, however, the Jews could not understand them nor do they understand them today. The meaning of these words is closed to them because of their stony hearts. To whom do they [the Jews] apply these words? To no one. How do they [the Jews] interpret these words? They do not. They pass by these words as a blind man passes by an open door. If they were able to comprehend these words, would they have then acted in such a manner as they acted with the prophet and the prophesied One [Christ]? Would they have sawn Isaiah and crucified Christ on the Cross?

The Jews considered the law of Moses to be the only and final law of God. That is why they were unable to comprehend the meaning of the prophecy of the new law from Zion, i.e., from the House of David, for David glorified Zion. But if the Jews did not know to comprehend the new law through the old law, we Christians know that through the new law we comprehend the old law. The Jews only had a tree without fruit but we have the tree and the fruit. They only had an image without reality, but we have both reality and the image. They adhered only to promises and that, incorrectly understood, but we have the promises and the fulfillment.

O All-rich Lord, Who has enriched us with Your spiritual law and Your life-giving words, You only do we worship and to You only do we pray; grant us wisdom and power to live according to Your law and to uphold Your holy word, so that we may not become poor before You, Who has made us rich!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 8 -

1. SAINT EMILIAN THE CONFESSOR, BISHOP OF CYZICUS

Emilian served as bishop in Cyzicus during the reign of the nefarious Emperor Leo the Armenian, the iconoclast. Since he did not want to submit to the decrees of the emperor concerning the removal of icons from the churches, Emilian and other Orthodox bishops were banished into exile. He spent five years in exile, enduring much pain and humiliation for the sake of Christ. Emilian died in they year 820 A.D. and took up habitation among the citizens of heaven.

2. SAINT MYRON, MIRACLE-WORKER AND BISHOP OF CRETE

At first, Myron was married and engaged in farming. Myron, gladly and abundantly distributed the fruits of his land to needy people. At one time, he encountered unknown thieves stealing wheat from his threshing floor. Not telling them who he was, St. Myron helped the thieves fill the sacks, lift them on their backs and to escape. Because of his exceptional virtues, Myron was ordained a presbyter and after that consecrated a bishop. He was a great miracle-worker and performed many good and mighty works in the name of the Lord Jesus. Myron died about the year 350 A.D. in the hundredth year of his life.

3. THE VENERABLE GREGORY SINAITE

Gregory is called Sinaite because he received the monastic tonsure on Mount Sinai. During the reign of Emperor Andronicus Palaeologus, about the year 1330 A.D., he arrived at Mt. Athos to visit the monasteries and to inquire about the practice of mental prayer and contemplation. However, these two forms of spiritual works [exercises], at that time, were almost unknown among the holy Athonites. The only one who knew this and practiced it to perfection was St. Maximus of Kapsokalyvia. Gregory spread his teaching about mental prayer throughout all the cells and monasteries on Mt. Athos. His distinguished disciple was Kallistos, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who wrote the biography of St. Gregory. After that, Gregory crossed over to Macedonia and to the other regions of the Balkans and established communities in which the monks practiced mental prayer. Thus, he assisted many to be immersed in prayer and to be saved. His writings about mental prayer and asceticism can be found in the book "Dobrotoljublja The Philokalia." Among other things, he wrote the refrains to the Holy Trinity, "It is meet and right", which is sung at the Midnight Service of the Resurrection. Gregory ranks among the most eminent ascetics and spiritual teachers of the Balkans. He died peacefully after a long and laborious life and took up habitation in the Kingdom of God.

4. THE HOLY NEO-MARTYRS TRIANDAPHYLLOS AND SPASO

Triandaphyllos was born in Zagora and Spaso was born in Radoviste in the Diocese of Strumica. They were both Slavs. Both were young and simple men. But their love for Christ was more precious to them than this world or this life. They gave their lives and did not betray Christ. They suffered at the hands of the Turks for the Faith of Christ: Triandaphyllos in Constantinople in the year 1680 A.D. and Spaso in Thessalonica in the year 1794 A.D.

5. THE HOLY MARTYR GORMIZDAS

Gormizdas was a nobleman at the court of the Persian Emperor Yezdegeherd. Since he chose not to deny Christ, the emperor saddened Gormizdas, by confiscating his rank and property and sent him to tend livestock. The emperor hoped that Gormizdas would quickly long for his rank and property and that he would worship the idols. However, the king was fooled. Gormizdas peacefully tended the livestock and kept his faith. For that, the emperor subjected him to cruel tortures, which only succeeded to exhaust the body of Christ's martyr but was unable to alter his spirit. Finally, Gormizdas was slain in the year 418 A.D. immediately after the martyrdom of St. Abdus the bishop (March 31). Gormizdas was martyred on earth and glorified in heaven.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT GREGORY SINAITE

Sinaite, the all-wise one, taught the monks,
And, by his example, confirmed his teachings:
Passionlessness, that is the Promised Land,
By the Spirit, the passionless soul illumined.
Without any thoughts, man then becomes
When, with prayer, his mind rests in the heart.
Of all passions, thoughts are sinful forerunners,
Which, in the demonic authority, keeps the soul.
Sick people are we; for us, the physician medicine prepared,
To be healed, to be healthy.
The Name of Jesus, in your heart, speaks,
It will, as a fire, consume passions,
Let that powerful name, with heavenly radiance
In your heart move, with breathing.
If, in your heart, you do not have Jesus the Lord
All other mortifications, remain as water.
Only Jesus inside me is able
The water of my being, into wine to convert.
As in a nest, your whole mind, in the heart place,
And then glorify Jesus, by ceaseless prayer.
O, Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner!
Let the prayer be slow; not hurried -
Until the heart, from prayer, bursts into flame -
Then, the mind, heaven sees and on earth, remains not.

REFLECTION

Moses spoke to the sons of Israel: **"I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life...that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).** There are some decisive moments in the life of men when, indeed, it is left up to man to choose between life or death. Judas, in a decisive moment, was corrupted by silver and he chose death, i.e., the sin of avarice [greed]. When the general wanted to elevate Marinus the soldier (August 7) to the rank of an officer (centurion), envious men accused him of being a Christian. The general permitted him only three hours to contemplate and to choose between life or death, i.e., either to deny Christ or to die. Marinus, hearing the words of his superior, went to the local bishop, Theotechnus, and asked him for advice. The bishop led Marinus into the church, stood him before the Gospel and pointing his hand, at first to the Gospel and after that to the sword which hung from Marinus' waist, said to him: "Choose courageous man, one of these two; either to wear the sword and serve the earthly king temporarily and, after death, be lost eternally or to become a soldier of the Heavenly King and lay down your life for His Holy Name which is written in this Book and to reign with Him in eternal life." Marinus immediately decided, kissed the Book of the Holy Gospel and departed through death into life eternal.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous appearance of God to the child Samuel (**1 Samuel 3 1 Kings 3**):

1. How one night when Samuel was lying down, the Lord called him three times by name;
2. How the Lord related to Samuel the threat to the House of Eli [Heli] because of the corruptness of the sons of Eli and a threat to all of Israel;
3. How the Lord did not want to appear either to Eli, the high priest or to his sons but rather to Samuel, an innocent child.

HOMILY

-About the peace-making of Christ-

"And they [the people] shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

How clearly the prophet sees Christ the Peacemaker! One by one, the prophet points out the dignity of the Savior. First of all, the prophet pointed Him out as the Lawgiver of the new law, a law for all the peoples on earth. After that the prophet pointed out His exaltedness above all heights, earthly and historical. And now, the prophet points Him out as the Peacemaker whose power and love will forge [beat] swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Has this great prophecy about peace been fulfilled? Yes it has, in spite of the fact that wars still exist. Behold, wars among Christian peoples are not the same as wars among pagans. Pagans fought with pride while Christians fight with shame. Pagan faiths inhabited their heaven only with warriors and the Christian Faith promises heaven to the saints. As Christians, by their weakness, repeat certain other pagan sins, so they repeat the sin of waging war. However, God examines the heart and knows with what disposition the pagans sin and with what disposition the Christians sin. The Pharisees denied Christ, Peter also denied Him. But the Pharisees denied Him with unrepentant malice and Peter denied Him in shame and again, confessed Him with repentance.

However brethren, what can we say concerning the swords and spears of passions by which we kill our souls and the souls of our fellow men? O, when we would beat those swords into plowshares that deeply plow the souls and sow the noble seed of Christ in ourselves! And when we would beat the spears into pruning hooks to harvest the tares in our souls and to burn them! Then the peace of Christ would take up abode in the souls of all of us, just as it abided in the souls of the saints. Who then would even think about war against his neighbors and against neighboring peoples?

O how wondrous is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of God!

O Lord, beat the weapons of war in us into instruments of peace by the fire of Your word.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE MATTHIAS

Matthias was born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah. He studied with St. Simeon the "Receiver of God" in Jerusalem. When the Lord went out to preach about the Kingdom of God Matthias then joined the others who loved the Lord, for he himself loved Him with all his heart and with delight did he hear His words and witnessed His works. In the beginning, Matthias was numbered among the Seventy Lesser Disciples of Christ but following the resurrection of the Lord, since the place of Judas was vacated, the apostles, by drawing lots, chose this Matthias in place of Judas as one of the Twelve Great Apostles. **"And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus and Matthias. And they prayed and said: 'You Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show which of these two You have chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell that he might go to his own place' " (Acts 1:23-26).** Receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Matthias set out to preach the Gospel, first of all in Judea and after that in Ethiopia where he endured great tortures for the sake of Christ. It is held that he preached throughout Macedonia where they wanted to blind him but he became invisible to his torturers and thus escaped danger. Being in prison, the Lord appeared to him, encouraged him and freed him. Finally, he returned again to his work in Judea. There he was accused and brought to court before the high priest Ananias before whom he fearlessly witnessed for Christ. Ananias, the same Ananias, who before that, slew the Apostle James, condemned Matthias to death. They led Matthias out, stoned him to death and, after that, decapitated him with an axe (this was the Roman manner of killing a person who was sentenced to death and the hypocritical Jews applied this method on the dead man so as to show the Romans that the slain person was an enemy of Rome). Thus, this great apostle of Christ died and took up habitation in the eternal joy of his Lord.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ANTHONY

Anthony was a citizen of Alexandria. Brought before the pagan prince, he freely confessed his faith and was tortured, flogged and scrapped but he would not deny Christ. Finally, he was thrown into a fire and, from the midst of the fire, he spoke to the people: "My beloved brethren, do not be a slave to the body but rather concern yourself more about the soul which is given to you by God and is kindred to God and to the heavenly hosts." And so, instructing his people and burning in the fire, Anthony gave up his holy soul to God.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS JULIAN AND MARCIAN AND OTHERS WITH THEM

They all suffered at the hands of the wicked Emperor Leo the Isaurian in defense of icons in the year 716 A.D. and were crowned with unfading glory.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MATTHIAS, THE APOSTLE

Matthias, the Apostle, spoke about Christ
And openly witnessed, before the Jews:
He is that Messiah, about Whom the Scripture writes,
He is the Son of God, Who from on High descended,
He is the Word of God, Divine Hypostasis,
About Him the prophets clearly spoke:
Moses prophesied: A prophet as I
From God, with radiance will shine among you.
And King David said: All the generations of the earth
By Him, will be glorious and blessed.
Isaiah, with a courageous spirit, toward heaven flies
And saw and said: "A virgin shall conceive
And give birth to a Son and a name to Him give,
Emmanuel, will He be called 'God is with us' ".
Still Jonah, the prototype of His burial was,
As the burial, so also the resurrection
When, in the belly of the whale, for three days, he lay
And by God again, made worthy of life,
The shadows have past and the prophecies fulfilled,
The promised words, in the flesh, came.
But, in vain does the awake man speak to the one who sleeps,
He who sleeps throughout the entire day, in the day, does not believe.

REFLECTION

To take another's sin upon one's self, that is one form of martyrdom and the sign of one's overwhelming love for one's fellow man. As death is the consequence of sin, to take another's sin on one's self means to add to your own death still another death, **"And sin, when it is finished, brings forth death" (St. James 1:15)**. However, God rewards with resurrection those who, out of love, take another's death upon themselves. There are many examples how the saints took upon themselves the sins of their fellow men. Thus, it is said of St. Ammon: a brother fell into sin and came to Ammon and said to him that because of the sin he committed, he must leave the monastery and return to the world. Ammon said to the brother that he will take his sin upon himself and counseled the brother to remain in the monastery. The brother remained in the monastery and the elder Ammon proceeded to offer repentance and prayers to God. After a short time, the elder Ammon received a revelation from God that that sin is forgiven because of his love for the brother. When St. Macarius, St. Simeon the "fool for Christ", St. Theodora and others were accused of promiscuity, they did not defend themselves but, taking upon themselves the sin of others, received the weighty punishment for sin and patiently endured all until God revealed their innocence to men.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the punishment of God upon the people of Israel for the sins of the sons of Eli, the judge and high priest **(1 Samuel 4 1 Kings 4)**:

1. How the sons of the high priest [Hophni and Phinehas] sinned openly and secretly in Shiloh before the Ark of the Covenant;
2. How God gave the victory in battle to the Philistines over Israel in which many thousands of Israelites were slain, together with the sons of the high priest and the Ark of the Covenant was seized;
3. How, because of the sins of the elders of the people, God permits suffering on the entire nation.

HOMILY

-About the nothingness of the sinful before the majesty of God-

"Enter into the rock and hide thee in the dust, for the fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty" (Isaiah 2:10).

This is a bitter sneer of the prophet to his people, an idolatrous people. The people had rejected the faith in the one true God and began to worship idols of stone and earth. What will you do, O evil people, when "the fear of the Lord" appears? Where will you flee, when the "glory of His majesty" appears? Flee into the rocks from which you have made a god for yourselves! Flee into the dust, from which you have made a god for yourselves! O, how terrifying is the sneer of this discerning prophet! Who can enter into a rock and hide themselves? Who can flee into the dust and conceal himself from the Most High?

However, brethren let us leave the idolatry of the Jews for which they have been punished enough and, for a moment, let us look at the idolatry among us Christians. What is amassed gold, if not idol? What are gleaned fields other than an idol of dust? What are luxurious clothes other than an idol made from the skins and hairs of animals? Where will the idolaters of our generation hide when "the fear of the Lord" appears and when "the glory of his majesty" appears? Flee to gold, worshippers of gold! Flee to the earth, worshippers of the earth! Hide in the skins of animals and bury yourself with the hairs of foxes and the fibers of the dead silk worm, O, you idolaters! O bitter irony! All of this will be burned in the Day of the Lord, on that Dreadful Day. And man will stand face to face with the only Majestic and Eternal One. All the idols of mankind will be destroyed by fire before men and the Immortal Judge will ask the idolaters: "Where are your gods?"

Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of God, lived on earth a long time ago but his vision, even today, is dreadful, beneficial and, again, dreadful.

To You, the only One, the only living Lord, do we worship! All else is passing dust. Help us Lord, help us that our mind and heart does not adhere to the passing dust but to You, only to You, the only Living One.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 10 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS LAWRENCE AND SIXTUS, POPE OF ROME, AND OTHERS WITH THEM

When Pope Stephen was slain (August 2), then St. Sixtus, who was an Athenian by birth, was appointed in his place. At first, Sixtus was a philosopher and, after that, a Christian. At that time, the Bishops of Rome were slain one after the other, so that, to become Bishop of Rome meant to be taken out to death. Emperor Decius was determined to destroy Christianity and Pope Sixtus was quickly brought to trial with two of his deacons, Felicicius and Agapitus. As they were led to prison, Lawrence said to the pope: "Where are you going Father, without your son? Where O bishop, without your Archdeacon?" The pope consoled him, prophesying to Lawrence that he will undergo even greater tortures for Christ and that he [Lawrence] will shortly follow him [Sixtus]. And indeed, as soon as they had beheaded Sixtus and his two deacons, Lawrence was apprehended. Beforehand, Lawrence had placed all of his affairs and the affairs of the church in order. As treasurer and Oikonomos [steward] of the church, he removed all of the church's valuables to the home of the widower, Cyriacus. On that occasion, he healed Cyriacus of a terrible head pain by the touch of his hand and restored the sight of a blind man, Crescention. Thrown into prison, even there Lawrence healed Lucillus, a prisoner of many years, of blindness and after that baptized him. Witnessing this Hippolytus, the jailer, was also baptized, and later suffered for Christ (August 13). Since Lawrence did not want to deny Christ but, on the contrary, advised Emperor Decius to reject his false gods, he was beaten on the face with stones and beaten on his entire body with a scorpion [a whip, curved at the end like the tail of a scorpion] i.e., by a chain with sharp teeth. Romanus, a soldier present at the torture, believed in Christ and was immediately beheaded. Finally, they placed Lawrence naked on a gridiron and lighted a fire. Roasting in the fire, St. Lawrence thanked God and mocked the emperor for his paganism. After Lawrence gave up his pure and heroic soul to God, his body was removed at night by Hippolytus and taken, at first, to the home of Cyriacus and afterwards to a cave where Hippolytus honorably buried him. St. Lawrence, with the others, suffered in the year 258 A.D.

2. SAINT HIRON

Hiron was a Christian philosopher. He is mentioned by St. Gregory the Theologian in his books. He died peacefully and took up habitation with the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR, SAINT LAWRENCE

Lawrence, the evil emperor asks:

"Where are you from? What is your rank?

Lawrence, to the emperor replies:

"From Spain, educated in Rome,

And of the One God, a servant, I am."

"Of the Church's treasure, are you the guardian?"

"Of that good treasure, I am, O emperor."

Give us the treasure and your life, save!

The treasure of the Church, in heaven, is,

In the Lord Jesus, believe ye also,

And, of that treasure, an heir, you will be."

Lawrence, deny Christ!

"You, O Emperor, deny the idols!"

And the Emperor became infuriated and to the servants motioned,

Lawrence, they beat and crushed,

And on a fiery gridiron, they placed him.

This fire to me, it is cool,

And [the fire] for you in the midst of Hades is prepared!

Lawrence, deny Christ!

Are you not sorry, to die young?

Christ, on the Cross, suffered for me,

For me, He died; I, for Him, die

One side of the body, entirely burned,

Lawrence, to the executioners, speaks:

Half of the body is roasted,

Turn it over, behold food for you,

Turn it over, let the other side roast!

This said, he flew away

Into the sweet heavenly mansions.

REFLECTION

How can we overcome the enmity of our enemies? By renunciation, meekness and prayer. Renunciation in everything, except in faith and purity of life, meekness and prayer, always and always. St. Ambrose writes: "This is the weapon of the righteous ones that in retreating they conquer, just as the skillful archers have the custom that by fleeing, they shoot those stronger than themselves." A brother was offended by his friend but, nevertheless, desiring peace with him, went to him to be reconciled. However, his friend did not even want to open the door for him and scolding him from within, chased him away from his house. The brother then complained to a spiritual father who said to him: "Going to your friend to be reconciled, all along the way, you condemned him in your thoughts and justified yourself. I counsel you, even though your friend sinned against you, establish the thought in yourself that you have sinned against him and, in this manner, go to him and in your thoughts justify him and condemn yourself." Thus, the brother proceeded. And what happened? Just as the brother approached the house of his friend, he opened wide the door, ran up to him and embraced the offended brother and made peace with him.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the misery, which overcame the Philistines because of the captured Ark of the Covenant (**1 Samuel 5:6 - 1 Kings 5:6**):

1. How the people were afflicted with emerods [hemorrhoids] and mice in the crops wherever the Philistines set down the Ark of the Covenant;
2. How the frightened Philistines themselves returned the Ark of the Covenant to the land of Israel;
3. How the sacred thing of God punishes those who keep it [the Ark] in an unclean land of idols or in a heart, unclean by passions.

HOMILY

-About the weakness of sinful ones-

"As for my people, children are their oppressors and women rule over them" (Isaiah 3:12).

All that is of God is most beautiful and most wise. Everything created by God travels obediently along the path for which God has ordained it. The stars move, animals live and the atmospheric currents conform - all according to the order established by God. Only man, the most intelligent creature, frequently falls into ignorance and leaving the path of God, invents new paths according to his thinking. Because of that, it could happen that instead of the elders, children become leaders and instead of the husbands, wives begin to rule. When children rule oppression reigns and when women rule, disorder usually reigns. When this is permitted by God because this does not occur without the sin of a people and without the permission of God then the people find themselves under punishment for their sins, in the same way as when war comes and the enemy subdues the land, for all oppression is war and every disorder is a punishment for sin.

Just as oppression and disorder are able to reign in a nation so, in the same way, they are able to reign in the soul of man. Immature and impious thoughts represent children and physical sensual theorizing, represent women. When immature and impious thoughts prevail, then they oppress man and drag him from evil to evil as when children judge; and when physical theorizing prevails over the spiritual, masculine wisdom, which is from God, then they rule over man as an evil woman. Under "women", the prophet understands not only females, but also men with women's weaknesses.

So that children's ignorance and women's whims do not overtake man, or a nation, it is necessary to strictly adhere to the law of God, prescribed by God for men as all created things adhere to the law of God, prescribed for them by God.

O Lord, Creator and our Lawgiver, illumine us and strengthen us. Illumine us with the grace of the Spirit that we may always know Your law and strengthen us with the power of the Spirit to always adhere to Your law.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR EUPLUS

Euplus was a deacon in Catania, Sicily. Emperor Diocletian dispatched Commander Pentagurus to Sicily to exterminate any Christians he found there. Pentagurus did not find a single Christian, for the few that were there, hid from the persecutor and did not reveal themselves. Then someone accused St. Euplus of taking a book to secret Christians and reading to them. This book was the Holy Gospel. They soon brought him to court, hung that book around his neck and led him to prison. After seven days of imprisonment and hunger Euplus was handed over for torture. While they were beating him with iron rods, Euplus, mockingly said to the torturing judge: "O ignorant one, do you not see that because of God's help, these tortures are for me as a cobweb? If you can, find other harsher tortures, for all of these are as toys." Finally, they led the martyr of Christ out to the scaffold. Then St. Euplus opened the Holy Gospel and read from it to the people for a long time. Many converted to the Faith of Christ. St. Euplus was beheaded in the year 304 A.D. and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven. His miracle-working relics repose in a village near Naples called Vico della Batonia.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR SUSANNA THE VIRGIN, AND OTHERS WITH HER

Susanna was the daughter of a Roman presbyter Gavinius and the niece of Pope Gaius. Gaius and Gavinius were of royal lineage and kinsmen to the then Emperor Diocletian. Emperor Diocletian had an adopted son Maximian Galerius, whom he [Diocletian] wanted to marry Susanna. But Susanna, completely dedicated to Christ the Lord, did not want to hear at all about marriage and particularly not about marriage with an unbaptized man. Those who asked her to marry the emperor's son, the aristocrats, Claudia and Maxima, Susanna converted to the Christian Faith along with their entire household. Enraged by this, the emperor ordered that the executioners take Claudia and Maxima, with their families to Ostia where they were burned alive and their ashes thrown into the sea. However, Susanna was beheaded in the home of Gavinius. The emperor's wife Serena, secretly a Christian, removed Susanna's martyred body at night and honorably buried it, and Pope Gaius converted that house where Susanna was slain into a church and celebrated services there. Shortly following the suffering of this bride of Christ, her father Gavinius and her uncle Pope Gaius also suffered. They all suffered honorably for the Lord and received the wreath of glory in the years 295 A.D. and 296 A.D.

3. SAINT NIPHON, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Niphon was born in Greece. He was tonsured a monk in his youth and, at first, lived a life of asceticism outside the Holy Mountain [Athos] and, after that, on the Holy Mountain in various monasteries, remaining the longest in Vatopedi and Dionysiou. He was loved by all the holy Agiorites as much for his rare wisdom, as well as for his unusual meekness. He became the Bishop of Thessalonica against his will. Two years later, he journeyed to Constantinople on business and there, was elected to the vacant throne of the patriarchate. He was banished by the Sultan to Jedrene where he lived in exile. The Wallachian [Romanian] Prince Radul besought him from the Sultan and named Niphon as archbishop of the Wallachians. Because of Radul's transgressions, Niphon departed Wallachia and returned to Mount Athos to the community of Dionysiou where he lived a life of asceticism until his ninetieth year, when he took up habitation in the Kingdom of God in the year 1460 A.D. He composed the "**Prayer of Absolution**" read at the Burial Service:

[O Lord Jesus Christ, by His divine grace, as also by the gift and power vouchsafed unto His holy Disciples and Apostles, that they should bind and Loose the sins of men: (For He said to them: Receive you The Holy Spirit: whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins you retain they are retained. And whatsoever you shall bind or loose upon earth shall be bound or loosed also in Heaven. By the same power, also, transmitted to us from them, this my spiritual child, [Name], is absolved through me, unworthy though I be, from all things wherein, as mortal [**He-She**] have sinned against God, whether in word or deed or thought and with all [**His-Her**] senses, whether voluntary or involuntary; whether with knowledge or through ignorance. If [**He-She**] be under the ban or excommunication of a bishop or if a priest; or has sinned by any oath; or has been bound, as a man, by any sins whatsoever, but has repented him thereof, with contrition of heart: [**He-She**] is now absolved from all those faults and bonds. May all those things which have proceeded from the weakness of [**His-her**] mortal nature be consigned to oblivion and be remitted to [**Him-Her**]: Through His loving-kindness; through the prayers of our Most-holy and Blessed and Glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary; of all the holy, glorious and all-laudable Apostles and all of the Saints. Amen.]

4. THE VENERABLES BASIL AND THEODORE OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Both Basil and Theodore died by violence at the hands of the avaricious [money-loving] Prince Istislav in the year 1098 A.D. The hagiography of St. Theodore is especially instructive for the avaricious. Theodore was very wealthy and distributed all of his wealth to the poor and was tonsured a monk. After that, he repented and grieved for his wealth and was greatly tempted by the evil spirit of avarice from which St. Basil freed him.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SUSANNA, THE VIRGIN

Branch of Paradise, planted,
And on earth raised.
The branch grew and matured
With heaven, with the heart combined.
The black earth did not darken her
The evil of the world, did not bend her,
Susanna, a branch of Paradise is,
By God's Spirit, illumined,
Virgin, of Christ the God
The son of the emperor, scorned,
The emperor became angry; the emperor threatened her,
That he will bitterly avenge.
But, Susanna did not even want to listen,
In her, the mind of God contemplates
Her heart, illumined,
To Christ, betrothed.
The kinsmen were amazed
And in Christ, all were baptized
All the kinsmen, baptized were
And, martyrs became.
The emperor, his bloody hand, raised,
Upon Susanna, suffering imposed,
But, all the suffering is aimless,
When the soul, in the faith is powerful.
Susanna's head fell,
And her soul, in Paradise stood
In Paradise, stood before her Christ
Susanna's pure soul.

REFLECTION

If a man sets off on the path of righteousness let him walk only by the path of righteousness with both feet and let him not step with one foot on the righteous path and, with the other foot on the unrighteous path. For God said through the prophet about the righteous who commit unrighteousness: **"All his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed and in his sins that he has sinned, in them shall he die" (Ezekiel 18:24).** The Wallachian Prince Radul was a just man and performed many good deeds. He brought St. Niphon out of bondage in Jedrene and made him the Archbishop of Bucharest. But suddenly, Radul committed a dreadful transgression: he gave his sister to be the wife of the corrupt Prince Bogdan of Moldavia while Bogdan's wife was still living. Radul did not heed the protests of Niphon. Niphon prophesied an evil end for Radul, publicly excommunicating him from the Church and departed from Wallachia. Shortly thereafter, there was a drought and a great famine in Wallachia and Radul fell into an incurable illness and his entire body was covered with sores. And because of the stench, no one was able to approach him. When Radul was buried, his grave shook for three days, as once did the grave of Empress Eudoxia, the persecutor of St. John Chrysostom.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the self-will of the Jewish people **(1 Samuel 8 - 1 Kings 8):**

1. How the Jews sought of Samuel that he appoint a king for them;
2. How Samuel protested this in the name of the Lord Who proclaimed that He is the only King;
3. How the people remained stubborn, rejecting the will of God and the counsels of Samuel.

HOMILY

-About how ugliness comes with sin-

"Instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness ...and burning instead of beauty" (Isaiah 3:24).

This is the word about extravagant and wayward women, about the daughters of Zion who have become haughty and **"walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go and making a tinkling with their feet" (Isaiah 3:16).** What was it that made the Hebrew women proud? Was it virtue? Virtue never made anyone proud for, in fact, virtue is a cure against pride. Was it the strength of a people and the stability of the State? No, on the contrary, the prophet exactly fortells the imminent bondage of the people and the destruction of the State. And, as one of the main causes for slavery and destruction, the prophet cites vain extravagance, spiritual nothingness and wayward women. What, therefore, made them so proud and haughty? Ornaments and embroideries stranded beads and necklaces, trinkets and hairpins, garters and girdles, perfumes and rings, quivers and mirrors. Behold, this is what made them proud and haughty! Exactly, all of this is an expression of their ignorant pride but the true cause of their pride is spiritual nothingness. From spiritual nothingness comes pride and that external melange [mixture] of colors which women drape over their bodies is only an obvious manifestation of their ignorant pride. What will become of all this in the end? Stench, disheveledness, baldness and burning. This will occur when the people fall into bondage. As usually happens: first, the spirit is enslaved by the body and then the body is enslaved by an external enemy.

Thus, that will be even then when the inescapable conqueror of our bodies comes death. Sweet smells will not help in the grave, the kingdom of stench. Neither will there be a need for girdles for a naked spine [skeleton]. Neither will braided hair save the skull from baldness nor all the beauty from the black remains of burning. This is the inescapable fate of the most beautiful, the healthiest the wealthiest and the most extravagant women. But this is not the greatest misfortune. The greatest misfortune is that the souls of these women with their stench, disheveledness, baldness, and burning will come before God and before the heavenly hosts of the most beautiful of God's angels and righteous ones. For the stench of the body connotes the stench of the soul from depraved vices; a disheveled body connotes the insatiability of the soul for bodily pleasures; the baldness of the body connotes the baldness of the soul of good works and pure thoughts; burning of the body connotes the burning of the conscience and the mind.

O, how dreadful is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos; dreadful then and even dreadful today; dreadful, because it is true.

O, Lord Holy and All-pure, help the women who make the sign with Your Cross, that they may remember their souls and to cleanse their souls before Your Righteous Judgment, so that their souls, together, with their bodies do not become eternal stench.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS ANICETAS AND PHOTIUS

Emperor Diocletian once visited the city of Nicomedia with the evil intention to completely exterminate the Christians. But when he began his merciless torture of Christians, St. Anicetas, one of the high ranking officials of the city, boldly confessed before the emperor his faith in Christ the Lord, God incarnate in the flesh for our salvation. Along with this, Anicetas also denounced the idols as deaf and dumb stones and the worship of which is unworthy of a rational man. The emperor ordered his tongue to be severed but Anicetas, by the power of God, continued to speak. They then released a lion against him but the lion cuddled around him. At that moment the temple of Hercules collapsed. Photius, a kinsman of Anicetas, seeing the miracles and endurance of Anicetas, kissed him, declared himself a Christian and cried out to the emperor: " O idolator, be ashamed, your gods are nothingness!" The emperor then ordered that Anicetas immediately be beheaded. However, the executioner, raising his hand against holy Photius, struck himself with the sword and died. After prolonged tortures, both Anicetas and Photius were cast into prison where they languished for three years. Then they were brought out, a fire was lighted in an enormous furnace and they cast them into the fire. Many other Christians, men, women and children, willingly followed them into the fire. From the fire was heard the prayer of the Christians who were praising God for the death of martyrdom. They all suffered about the year 305 A.D. "Saint Anicetas and Saint Photius are invoked in the prayers in the Sacrament of Anointing with Oil [Holy Unction] and in the Blessing of Water."

[THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY UNCTIONANOINTING WITH HOLY OIL].

O holy Father, Physician of souls and bodies, who did send Your Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who heals every infirmity and delivers from death. Heal Thou, also Your servant **[Name]** from the ills of body and soul which do hinder **[Him Her]** and quicken **[Him Her]** by the grace of Your Christ: through the prayers of our Most Holy Lady, the Birth-giver of God and Ever-virgin Mary; through the intercession of the honorable Bodiless Powers of Heaven; through the might of the precious and Life-giving Cross, through the protection of the honorable, glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John; of the glorious and all-laudable Apostles; of the holy, glorious and right-victorious Martyrs; of our venerable and God-bearing Fathers; of the holy and healing, unmercenaries, Cosmas and Damian, Cyrus and John, Pantaleon and Hermolaus, Samson and Diomedes, Photius and Anicetas of the holy righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; and all the Saints.

For You are the Fountain of healing, O our God, and unto You do we ascribe glory, together with Your Only-begotten Son and Your Spirit, one in essence, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR ALEXANDER, BISHOP OF COMANA

As a simple charcoal-burner, Alexander lived in the town of Comana near Neo-Caesarea. When the bishop of Comana died, St. Gregory the miracle-worker and Bishop of Neo-Caesarea (November 17) was then called to preside at a council to elect a new bishop. Both clergy and laymen alike were present at the council. However, the electors were unable to agree on one person. At the time of evaluating a candidate, they all primarily paid attention to the points of his externals: external dignity and behavior. St. Gregory then said that they need not look so much at the external characteristics as much as at the spirit and spiritual capabilities. Then some jesters mocking cried out: then we should elect Alexander the charcoal-burner as our bishop! General laughter then ensued. St. Gregory asked: "Who is this Alexander?" And, thinking that his name was not mentioned at this council without God's Providence, Gregory ordered that Alexander be brought before the council. As a charcoal-burner, he was completely soiled and in rags. His appearance again evoked laughter in the council. Gregory then took Alexander aside and made him take an oath to speak the truth concerning himself. Alexander said that he was a Greek philosopher and that he enjoyed great honor and position but that he rejected all, humbled himself and made himself to be a "fool for the sake of Christ" from the time when he had read and understood Holy Scripture. Gregory ordered Alexander bathed and clothed in new attire and, with him, entered the council and before all began to examine Alexander in Holy Scripture. All were amazed at Alexander's wisdom and words of grace and could hardly recognize in this wise man, the former quiet charcoal-burner. Alexander was unanimously elected bishop. By his sanctity, wisdom and goodness, he gained the love of his flock. Alexander died a martyr's death for Christ during the reign of Diocletian.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ALEXANDER, BISHOP OF COMANA

Men look upon clothes and the face,
But God looks at the soul and the heart.
Glorious Alexander, a charcoal-burner, was,
With the charcoal-burner, the body is blackened
And from soot, which water cleanses,
In the sinner, the heart is darkened
Which only the fire of faith can cleanse
The fire of faith and the cry of repentance.
It is easier to cleanse the skin of a charcoal-burner
Than the blackened heart of a sinner.
Alexander, with humility, covered
In a cave concealed, as a hidden flame
For laughter, to the gullible world, he was.
The world did not see; Gregory saw,
With an acute spirit, the charcoal-burner discerned
And in him, found a saint,
In the dark cave, a beautiful flame,
Beneath the mask of insanity, great wisdom,
Beneath the dirty soot, a pure heart,
A royal soul in decayed rags.
That the light be hidden, the Lord does not permit,
At the appropriate time, the light proclaims,
For the benefit and salvation of men.
All is wonderful, what God judges.

REFLECTION

Learn to respect and to love the lowly and simple people. Such as these are the most on earth: such as these are the most in the Kingdom of Heaven. In them, there is no pride, i.e., the basic madness from which the souls of the rich and the powerful of this world suffer. They carry out their duty in this world perfectly and yet it appears to them amusing when someone praises them for it, while the self-seeking men of this world seek praise for all their work and often, it is imperfectly completed. St. Alexander was an eminent philosopher and he left everything, hid himself from exalted society, the praise of the world and mingled with the lowliest and the simplest of men, as a charcoal-burner among charcoal-burners. Instead of former praises and honors, he endured with rejoicing that children ran after him and laughed at him because of his sootiness and raggedness. However, Alexander was not the only one who liked to live with the lowly and simple. Many kings and princes, learning of the sweetness of Christ's Faith, removed the crowns from their heads and fled from aristocratic vanity to be among the simple people. Did not He alone, the King of Kings, the Lord our Christ appear among shepherds and fishermen? St. Zeno counsels: "Do not choose a glorious place for living and do not associate with a man of a prominent name."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the wondrous Providence of God at the election of Saul as king (**1 Samuel 9 - 1 Kings 9**):

1. How Saul went out to seek the lost asses;
2. How Samuel, to whom God revealed that Saul should be accepted as the king of Israel, met him;
3. How the Providence of God directs men and sometimes gives them that which they do not envision.

HOMILY

-About the awesome vision of the Prophet Isaiah-

"I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isaiah 6:1).

Here is the vision of visions! Here is the glory of glories and the majesty above majesties! God showed great mercy to all of mankind in that He gave them to see this great starry world to see, the work of His hands. Yet, He showed a yet greater mercy to those to whom He gave the eternal and wondrous angelic world to see. However, He showed the greatest mercy to a small number of His chosen ones, to whom He gave Himself to see, the Lord Sabaoth, the Only Uncreated One and Creator of both worlds. But, how can mortal man see the Immortal God? Did not God Himself say to Moses: **"For there shall no man see me and live" (Exodus 33:20)?** And, does not the Gospel say: **"No man has seen God at any time" (St. John 1:18).** Truly, no mortal one can see the face of God, i.e., the essence of God. But, by His condescension and infinite goodness and might, God can reveal to men, to some extent, and in some form, how accessible He is to men. In a particular form and appearance, He appeared to Moses, Elijah, Daniel and to John the Theologian not in His essence but in a particular form and appearance. Isaiah saw Him on a throne "high and lifted up" i.e., as the Judge raised above all the judges and all the earthly courts. The six-winged Seraphim stood around Him and cried one to another: **"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts" (Isaiah 6:3).** The Lord, therefore, is not alone but rather He is the King in His Invisible Kingdom surrounded by the most exalted of beings, who were created by His power. Around Him are the foremost orders of the heavenly hierarchy, the chief-commanders of His innumerable immortal hosts, the foremost lampstands of His light and His unendurable radiance.

This is the wondrous vision of Isaiah, the Son of Amos, the prophet of God.

O, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, Thrice Holy, have mercy on us and save us, impure and sinful.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR HIPPOLYTUS

Hippolytus was a military leader and the overseer of the prisons in Rome. He was born and raised a pagan. When St. Lawrence the archdeacon was thrown into prison, Hippolytus was ordered by the emperor to especially watch over this prisoner. Hippolytus saw with his own eyes how Lawrence restored the sight of the blind man Lucillus and how Lawrence cured many others who were sick and he [Hippolytus] believed in Christ. When Lawrence baptized him, Hippolytus had a heavenly vision and said: "I saw innocent souls in great happiness, i.e., in the heavens." He then took Lawrence into his own home and Lawrence baptized all the members, who with the old governess Concordia, numbered nineteen. When Lawrence was slain for Christ, Hippolytus took the body of the martyr at night, wrapped it in a winding sheet and honorably buried it. However, this somehow came to the ears of Emperor Decius and on the third day following the death of Lawrence, Hippolytus was arrested, brought before the emperor and refusing to deny the True Faith, he was stuck on the mouth with stones. After that, the emperor ordered Hippolytus to be stripped naked and flogged. Naked before the emperor, he said: **"You have not stripped me but rather you have begun to clothe me!"** Then they stretched him out on the ground and beat him mercilessly but Hippolytus only cried out: **"I am a Christian."** The emperor upon hearing that all of Hippolytus' household are Christians, he ordered that they all be brought in. The aged Concordia said: "We desire more to die honorably with our master in the Faith of Christ than to live dishonorably with you, who are unclean." Concordia was the first to be slain and, after her, the remaining eighteen were slain, all before the eyes of Hippolytus. Finally, they tied Hippolytus to a wild horse and dragged him here and there until the martyr gave up his soul to God.

2. SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK OR VORONEZH

Tikhon was born in a simple peasant family in the village of Korotsk in the providence of Novgorod in the year 1724 A.D. He received the monastic tonsure at age thirty-four and because of his mortifications and great spiritual wisdom, soon received greater and greater service until finally he was consecrated as the Bishop of Voronezh. His episcopacy lasted for almost five years and, because of frail health, he withdrew and took up residence in the monastery of Zadonsk. He died peacefully in the year 1783 A.D. in Zadonsk where his miracle-working relics now repose. He was a great ascetic of the Russian Church, rare shepherd, intercessor and an author of the most beautiful spiritual works. By his wisdom, holiness and asceticism, Tikhon can be equated among the great fathers of the Orthodox Church of ancient times. Because of the many witnessed miracles over his relics, he was proclaimed a saint, at first, by the people and after that by the official church in the year 1861 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE EMPRESS IRENE, IN MONASTICISM CALLED XENIA [KSENIA]

Irene was the wife of Emperor John Comnenus II, 1118-1143 A.D., called Calojohn (Caloyan), John the Good. In addition to her monastic mortifications and many good works, Irene is also famous because she built the Monastery of the Almighty [the Pantocrator] one of the most glorious and most beautiful monasteries in Constantinople. Later on, St. Stephen of Dechani lived a life of asceticism in this monastery.

4. THE VENERABLE SERIDUS

Seridus was renowned as the founder of the famous community near Gaza in Palestine. Such glorious fathers as: St. Barsanuphius, John, Abba Dorotheus, Dositheus and others lived a life of asceticism in this community. St. Seridus died in the sixth century and took up habitation in the eternal joy of his Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TIKHON OF ZADONSK

The hut of a peasant, a saint nurtured,
Him, the Orthodox Church, with the spirit imbued:
Tikhon, the hierarch, as a star shone
And spiritual mysteries, to the world related:
Read Holy Scripture, God, it conceals,
It conceals God, and God it reveals.
The books of the entire world, do not tell more
About God, about you than what the Scripture writes.
Behold, without God, one can not know God
It is in vain to inquire about God, outside of God.
God gives Himself to us, as much as He fits in our mind
Into an egg, one can not pour the sea.
How to save the soul, Holy Scripture teaches
From sin and death and damnation eternal.
He who is drowning, about water, does not ask,
Neither what is it? Nor how? Nor from where does it flow?
Rather, about his salvation only, is concerned
And a secure rock, fearfully seeks.
And the sea of life, stormily agitates
The wise one on this sea, for himself, salvation seeks.
What is this life? Of what is it made?
When death comes upon us, is that so important to know?
On the earth, knowledge and possessions remain,
To the grave, the body and the clothing is given over
The soul, only the soul can still be saved,
Endeavor and pray: help me O God!

REFLECTION

"Give thanks to the Lord but do not forget His great men, the poor and the needy, for they can accomplish much with God the Lord." These are the words of the illustrious Russian ascetic of the nineteenth century, Father Nazariah, the abbot of Valamo [Valaam]Monastery. He spoke these words to the wife of a high-ranking official in Petrograd [St. Petersburg] who fell into disfavor with the Tsar because of certain serious accusations. The accused official became ill from worry and lay in bed. Hearing that Father Nazariah arrived in Petrograd, the wife of this official hurriedly sought him out and related the misfortune which had befallen them and implored him to pray to the Lord for her husband. "Do you have any copper or silver coins in change?" Father Nazariah asked her. The woman brought the coins and gave them to him. And so, Father Nazariah left. The same evening Nazariah again returned and gladdened the wife with this news: "Glory to God, all those close to the Tsar [God, the King] have promised to pray for you." Naturally, the wife thought of Tsar Alexander Pavlovitch and his courtiers, while the spiritual father was thinking about the beggars on the streets to whom he had distributed the coins and sent them to pray to God for the husband of this woman. And surely the news arrived that the emperor ordered that the matter concerning this official be taken up again and reviewed. And, it was just what the official wanted. When the woman began to thank Father Nazariah, he said: **"Give thanks to the Lord but do not forget His great men, the poor and the needy, for they can accomplish much with God the Lord."**

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the wondrous might of prophesying (1 Samuel 10 - 1 Kings 10):

1. How Samuel prophesied to Saul all that will happen to him one day;
2. How the Spirit of God came upon Saul and he also prophesied.

HOMILY

-About the chief prophesy of the Prophet Isaiah-

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

This glorious prophecy concerning the birth of the Lord by a virgin was spoken by Isaiah, the prophet who saw God, at the moment of the greatest despair which befell Jerusalem. The multitudinous army of Syrians and Ephriams had surrounded the city, around the very walls of the city. King Ahaz, with neither an army nor weapons and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were in mortal fear. **"The heart of the king [Ahaz] and the heart of the people trembled, as the trees of the forest tremble in the wind" (Isaiah 7:2).** In that final hour of the king's despair, Isaiah came before the king and by command of God said to him: **"Fear not neither be fainthearted" (Isaiah 7:4).** Then Isaiah prophesied that the enemies would not take Jerusalem. Seeing that King Ahaz did not believe him, Isaiah told the king to ask for a sign, a miracle, be it from heaven or from earth. However, the unbelieving king did not want to ask but remained obstinate in his doubt. The prophet then said that God would give them a sign, even though they did not seek it. This sign refers to distant times and concerns the universal salvation of the mankind. "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel" which is to say: **"God is with us."** Why did not the prophet immediately give a sign so that the king would believe? Because, that prophecy about the salvation of Jerusalem, in the hour when the king thought that all had fallen, was sufficient enough to show both the power of God and the unbelief of the king. Why did the prophet, at that very moment and under such circumstances, foretell the prophecy of the birth of the Savior? Because mankind, at the time of the coming of the Savior, will be in the same kind of despair, pressured by and surrounded by the powers of the demons, as was Jerusalem at that moment. Did the prophet explicitly say Virgin and not a Woman? Naturally, he mentioned a Virgin. For if the prophesy were spoken of a woman, what kind of miracle would it be; what kind of sign? Are not all men born of women? All the weight of emphasis is on the word **"Virgin."**

Thus, the All-seeing God knows how to tie in the near with the distant and that, by fulfilling one prophecy in the present, He confirms a second prophecy in the future. "Emmanuel God is with us" - He saved Jerusalem then as an invisible God. "Emmanuel God is with us" He will save mankind in similar dangers later on as the Incarnate God, as God-Man, born of the All-Pure Virgin and the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, Who gave power to the prophets to see the truth as it comes from afar, give us the power to embrace that truth which has already come.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 14 -

1. THE HOLY PROPHET MICAH [MICHEA]

Micah was of the tribe of Judah and from the village of Morasth for which he is called the "Morasthite." He was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and the Jewish kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Micah rebuked the vices of his people and rebuked the false prophets who prophesied **"of wine and of strong drink" (Micah 2:11)**. He foretold the destruction of Samaria. He also foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, which will come because their leaders accept bribes, the priests teach for lucre and its prophets tell fortunes for money. **"Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field and Jerusalem shall become as heaps" (Micah 3:12)**. But, of all his prophecies, the most important prophecy is that of the Messiah, especially the place of His birth. He mentioned Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah, **"Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2)**. It is not known exactly whether this prophet was slain by the Jews or whether he died a peaceful death. **"Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah and spoke to all the people of Judah saying, Thus said the Lord of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field and Jerusalem shall become heaps and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? Did he not fear the Lord and besought the Lord and the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls" (Jeremiah 26:18-19)**. However, it is known that he was buried in his village and his relics were found, together with the relics of the Prophet Habakkuk, during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great according to a mysterious revelation, which Bishop Zevin of Eleutheropolis received.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR MARCELLUS, THE BISHOP OF APAMAEA

Marcellus was born on Cyprus of wealthy and eminent parents and he was highly- educated. He entered into marriage and had children. When his wife died, Marcellus withdrew to the monastic life in Syria, leaving his children to the Providence of God. He became famous because of his compassion, meekness and spiritual knowledge because of which the Ampamaens elected him as their bishop. As a bishop, Marcellus zealously labored to convert pagans to the Christian Faith. When an idolatrous temple was burned the idolaters seized Marcellus, supposedly as the one who had caused the fire, and burned him in fire about the year 389 A.D. Especially instructive in the life of St. Marcellus is that the blessing of water and the use of blessed water is mentioned there.

HYMN OF PRAISE

MICAH

Micah, God's prophet, with the Spirit of God burns,
Salvation speaks and punishment prophesies:
"Hear, you leaders of the house of Jacob" [Micah 3:1],
When fire erupts, the chaff is not saved.
You hate readily and evil, evil you relish,
God's people, you heartlessly fleece,
The prophets of old and the law you have abandoned,
To God you do not harken, to the fortune-tellers you harken!
But misfortune, pain and weeping will come,
To cry out to heaven, in vain and too late,
For the Assyrians, Samaria will be the threshing floor
For the rabid Chaldeans, Jerusalem, the threshing floor.
"And you Bethel Ephratha small" [Micah 5:1],
To me, you are the dearest, even though you are the least
From you, the Leader whom we need, will come forth
His coming, from the depths of heaven,
Out of burning love, He will come willingly
With His mighty staff, His flock He will tend.
"His greatness [authority] shall reach to the ends of the earth" [Micah 5:3].
The earth, with the heavens, to Him with mercy shall sing
And peace will reign, He, that peace will be,
By Himself, He will glorify the human race.

REFLECTION

Beware of a parent's curse for a parental curse is a dreadful thing. Appreciate and seek a parental blessing for it will accompany you throughout your entire life. The all-wise Sirach speaks: **"For the blessing of the father establishes the houses of children but curse of the mother rooteth out foundations"** (Sirach 3:9 Ecclesiasticus 3:9). The curse by which Noah cursed the descendants of Ham still follows the unfortunate Hamites today. However, to the sons of Jacob, it was the same as their father blessed them in their life. St. Sergius, as a young man, begged his parents for their blessing in order for him to become a monk. But, the aged parents begged their son to wait awhile and to labor around them until their death and after that to become tonsured a monk. Sergius obeyed his parents and was blessed until his death. Bishop Hermogenes relates an incident how a son mistreated his wife. When his mother, with tears, began to scold him because of this, the son attacked his mother, beat her and smashed her head against a wall. The sorrowful mother cried out: "Lord, may my son be cursed and may he not have my blessing nor Your blessing." That same day, the son began to tremble throughout his entire body and for thirteen years he lived in this state of trembling not even able to raise a spoon to his mouth. After thirteen years, he made his confession and received the Sacrament of Holy Communion which made it somewhat easier for him and soon after that he died.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the wondrous assistance of God to Saul in battle with the Ammonites (**1 Samuel 11 -1 Kings 11**):

1. How the powerful Nahash [Naas], the leader of the Ammonites, threatened to pluck out the right eye of all the Israelites;
2. How the people of Israel wept before the Lord;
3. How Saul and Samuel, with God's help, destroyed the Ammonites for the Spirit of God was upon Saul and Samuel.

HOMILY

-About the prophesied light in darkness-

"The people that walked in the darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

There where it is the darkest, the prophet foretells there will appear the light-bearing Messiah. The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali were considered as the darkest lands. There, the pagans were intermingled with the Jews; the yoke of external and internal slavery is the most difficult; the darkness of the pagans and the darkness of the Pharisees covered the people with the shadow of death. The Light of Heaven shown first in Bethlehem Christ the Lord was born there. That Light was seen from afar by eastern Magi and, in the vicinity, by the shepherds of Bethlehem. But that Light was driven out of Bethlehem by the bloody sword of Herod and the Light withdrew to Egypt. After that, the Light shown in full radiance in this land of darkness and the shadow of death, in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. In this land, alongside the lake, there lived fishermen whom our Lord chose for His disciples. In this land is the Mount of the Beatitudes from which the Lord proclaimed His first great sermon about the blessed. There, also, is Cana of Galilee where the Lord worked His first miracle. There, He began His work for the salvation of mankind by His powerful word and by His powerful deeds. Men saw this great Light and were astonished. Many were scandalized at the Lord and many mocked Him. But these men of darkness did not kill Him. There was another darker spot in the land of the Jews, which raised its hand against the Creator and killed Him. That is the same spot from which Herod, thirty-three years earlier, raised his bloody sword, to extinguish this great Light by blood, i.e., Jerusalem. Of all the darkness, the darkness of Jerusalem was the darkest. Perhaps the darkest because she [Jerusalem] named herself as the light.

O Lord, our Great and All-great Light, encompass us by Your light in this short period of time and receive us after death into Your Light, glorious and immortal.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 15 -

1. THE DORMITION [THE FALLING ASLEEP - THE ASSUMPTION] OF THE MOST-HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD

The Lord Who, on Mt. Sinai, commanded by His Fifth Commandment: "**Honor your father and your mother**" (**Exodus 20:12**), showed by His own example how one should respect one's parent. Hanging on the Cross in agony, He remembered His mother and indicating to the Apostle John, said to her: "**Woman behold your son**" (**St. John 19:26**). **After that, He said to John: "Behold your mother"** (**St. John 19:27**). And so providing for His mother, He breathed His last. John had a home on Zion in Jerusalem in which the Theotokos settled and remained there to live out the end of her days on earth. By her prayers, gentle counsels, meekness and patience, she greatly assisted the apostles of her Son. Primarily, she spent her entire time in Jerusalem often visiting those places which reminded her of the great events and of the great works of her Son. She especially visited Golgotha, Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives. Of her distant journeys, her visit to St. Ignatius the Theophorus [God-bearer] in Antioch is mentioned, as well as her visit to Lazarus (whom our Lord resurrected on the fourth day), the Bishop of Cyprus, her visit to the Holy Mountain [Athos] which she blessed and her stay in Ephesus with St. John the Evangelist [The Theologian] during the time of the great persecution of Christians in Jerusalem. In her old age, she often prayed to the Lord and her God on the Mount of Olives, the site of His Ascension, that He take her from this world as soon as possible. On one occasion, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her and revealed to her that within three days she will find repose. The angel gave her a palm-branch to be carried at the time of her funeral procession. She returned to her home with great joy, desiring in her heart once more to see in this life, all of the apostles of Christ. The Lord fulfilled her wish and all of the apostles, borne by angels in the clouds, gathered at the same time at the home of John on Zion. With great rejoicing, she saw the holy apostles, encouraged them, counseled them and comforted them. Following that, she peacefully gave up her soul to God without any pain or physical illness. The apostles took the coffin with her body from which an aromatic fragrance emitted and, in the company of many Christians, bore it to the Garden of Gethsemane to the sepulchre of [her parents], Saints Joachim and Anna. By God's Providence, they were concealed from the evil Jews by a cloud. Anthony, a Jewish priest, grabbed the coffin with his hands with the intention of overturning it but, at that moment, an angel of God severed both his hands. He then cried out to the apostles for help and was healed since declaring his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Thomas was absent, again according to God's Providence, in order that a new and all-glorious mystery of the Holy Theotokos would again be revealed. On the third day, Thomas arrived and desired to venerate [kiss] the body of the Holy All-pure one. But when the apostles opened the sepulchre, they found only the winding sheet and the body was not in the tomb. That evening, the Theotokos appeared to the apostles surrounded by a myriad of angels and said to them: "Rejoice, I will be with you always". It is not exactly known how old the Theotokos was at the time of her Falling Asleep but the overwhelming opinion is that she was over sixty years of age.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE MOST-HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD [THE THEOTOKOS]

Thus spoke the Lord Most High
From your heart, Virgin pure,
Living water, to flow,
That, those who thirst, drink Christ -
Life-bearing Source,
We are all boastful of you!
So that the thirsty, drink Christ:
By Him, the bitter to be sweetened,
By Him, the blind to be washed
And by Him, the sorrowful, to heal their grief
Life-bearing Source
We are all boastful of you!
Beverage, from eternity arrived,
The arid time, the brook filled,
And again, toward the heavens raised;
The world exhausted, became refreshed-
Life-bearing source,
We are all boastful of you!
O All-pure One, glory to You,
O Mother of God, glory to You!
For us, to the Living Christ, You gave birth
The living water of grace -
Life-bearing source
We are all boastful of you!

REFLECTION

Each one of the faithful can learn much, indeed very much, from the life of the Virgin Theotokos. However, I would like to mention here only two things. First, she had the habit to frequently on Golgotha, on the Mount of Olives, in the Garden of Gethsemane, to go to Bethlehem and to other places famous because of her Son. At all of these places, especially Golgotha, she prayed on bended knees. By this, she gave the first example and incentive to the faithful to visit the holy places out of love toward Him Who, by His presence and by His passion and glory, made these places holy and significant. Second, we learn how she, in her prayer, prayed for a quick departure from this life that her soul, at the time of her separation from the body, not see the prince of darkness and his horrors, and hidden from the dark regions not encounter the power of Satan. Do you see how terrible it is for the soul to pass through the toll-gates [mitarstva]! When she, who gave birth to the Destroyer of Hades and, who herself has frightening power over demons prayed thusly, what then is left for us? Out of very great humility, she commended herself to God and did not trust in her own deeds. So much less should we trust in our deeds and even more we should commend ourselves into the hands of God, crying out for His mercy, especially for mercy at the time of the departure of the soul from the body.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the wondrous proof by which Samuel confirmed his words before the people (**1 Samuel 12 - 1 Kings 12**):

1. How Samuel told the people it is evil before the Lord that they seek a king for themselves beside the Lord, the King;
2. How for the confirmation of his words, he called upon God to permit thunders and rain;
3. How the thunders and rain descended and how the people were frightened of God and of Samuel.

HOMILY

-About the most glorious Child-

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Upon whom of mortal man, in human history could all of these titles, all of this authority, all of this glory apply? There is no one. That is why St. Chrysostom says: "It is impossible to understand this in regard to any other man but only in reference to Christ." The prophet here clearly expresses two natures in the Savior of the world: the Human and the Divine. "A Child is born," this signifies a purely human nature. "Unto us a Son is given," this unites the two natures in one person: the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin in the person of the Incarnate Lord. However, the remaining titles signify the divine nature of the Lord Jesus. His government is "upon His shoulder," i.e., the government is His. His own government and is not borrowed. "Mighty Counsellor," is this not the Holy Trinity? The angel or messenger and herald of this Triune Counsel is the Son of God, the Pre-eternal Word. "Wonderful Counsellor," for all that is wonderful, all that is an amazement, all that is new which came to mankind is from Him and through Him.

"The Mighty God," what would Arius and his modern adherents, who deny the divinity of the Lord Jesus, say to this? "The Prince of Peace," for from Him is lasting peace; outside Him is war, without and within. "The Everlasting Father," [the Father of future times] as He is the Lord of the past, so also is He the Lord of the future. Furthermore, He is also the Father of the Church, the Creator of the new world, the Founder of the Kingdom of God.

Isaiah himself, the son of Amos, saw this wonderful and true vision some seven hundred years before it was revealed to the entire universe.

O Lord Jesus, You are to the prophets the most glorious prophecy and to the faithful, the most glorious revelation. Unlock our mind that the wonderful glory of Your majesty can enter into it and unlock our heart so that it would be filled by Your life-creating love.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE ICON OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, "NOT MADE WITH HANDS"

At the time when our Lord preached the Good News and healed every illness and infirmity of men, there lived in the city of Edessa on the shore of the Euphrates Prince Abgar who was completely infected with leprosy. He heard of Christ, the Healer of every pain and disease and sent an artist, Ananias, to Palestine with a letter to Christ in which he begged the Lord to come to Edessa and to cure him of leprosy. In the event that the Lord was unable to come, the prince ordered Ananias to portray His likeness and to bring it to him, believing that this likeness would be able to restore his health. The Lord answered that He was unable to come, for the time of His passion was approaching took a towel, wiped His face and, on the towel, His All-pure face was perfectly pictured. The Lord gave this towel to Ananias with the message that the prince will be healed by it, but not entirely, and later on, He would send him a messenger who would erase the remainder of his disease. Receiving the towel, Prince Abgar kissed it and the leprosy completely fell from his body but a little of it remained on his face. Later, the Apostle Thaddaeus, preaching the Gospel, came to Abgar and secretly healed and baptized him. The prince then destroyed the idols which stood before the gates of the city and above the gates he placed the towel with the likeness of Christ attached to wood, framed in a gold frame and adorned with pearls. Also, the prince wrote beneath the icon on the gates: **"O Christ God, no one will be ashamed who hopes in You."** Later, one of Abgar's great grandsons restored idolatry and the bishop of Edessa came by night and walled up that icon over the gates. Centuries have passed since then. During the reign of Emperor Justinian, the Persian King Chozroes attacked Edessa and the city was in great hardship. It happened that Eulabius, the Bishop of Edessa, had a vision of the All-Holy Theotokos who revealed to him the mystery of the sealed wall and the forgotten icon. The icon was discovered and, by its power, the Persian army was defeated.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR DIOMEDES [DIOMIDIUS]

Diomedes was of prominent birth and a physician from Tarsus. Healing the people, Diomedes taught them about the Faith of Christ. Emperor Diocletian ordered him beheaded in Nicaea in the year 298 A.D. Those who beheaded him and brought his head to the emperor were blinded and when they returned the head to the body and prayed, they were made whole again.

3. THE VENERABLE JOACHIM OSOGOVSK

Joachim lived a life of asceticism in the second half of the eleventh century on the Osogovsk mountain in a cave at a place called Sarandopor. Later, in this place, another ascetic, Theodore from the Field of Sheep, to whom St. Joachim appeared in a dream, built a church. Throughout the centuries, many miracles occurred over the relics of the Venerable Joachim and still do today.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR STAMATIUS

Stamatius was a peasant born in Volos in Thessaly. When an inhuman Agha [Aga] collected the royal tribute from the people and greatly mistreated them, Stamatius departed for Constantinople with several of his companions to complain to the Vizir [Vizier]. By his sharp criticisms of the Agha, Stamatius offended the sultan's noblemen and they arrested him. At first, they wanted to convert him to Islam by flattery, promising him riches, glory and honor. But the martyr cried out: "My riches, glory and honor; that is my Christ." Then the Turks tortured him and finally, before the Church of the Divine Wisdom [Hagia Sophia], Stamatius was beheaded in the year 1680 A.D. That is how this soldier of Christ was crowned with the martyr's wreath.

HYMN OF PRAISE

PRINCE ABGAR

A gentle God, Who reveals mysteries,
Wonderful mysteries, never before dreamed of,
Once by the lake, You proclaimed
That many pagan peoples
From throughout the east, to the west
With Abraham to sit at the table,
And the unbelieving sons of the Jews
To utter darkness, will be expelled
Because of their hardened heart.
The mystery You spoke and the mystery came about:
The Jews in Your face gazed,
Behind Your back, death, were preparing.
And from distant regions, Prince Abgar,
A leprous body and a wretched soul
From a false faith of paganism,
Heard of You from mouth to mouth,
Heard of Your words and miracles,
Heard of You and, in You, believed
Of Your All-pure face, saw the likeness
With tears, kissed the likeness
In both body and soul, became whole
His soul in Paradise, took up abode
With Abraham to rejoice eternally.

REFLECTION

The Orthodox Church surpasses all other Christian groups in the richness of her Tradition. The Protestants want only to adhere to Holy Scripture. But, not even Holy Scripture can be interpreted without Tradition. The Apostle Paul himself commands: **"Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15)**. The tradition of Prince Abgar, without doubt, is of Apostolic Tradition even though the apostles do not mention him in their writings. The Apostle Thaddaeus, did not write anything at all and, according to Protestant thinking, did not say anything and neither did he teach the faithful. According to what then was he an apostle of Christ? St. John Damascene [Damaskin] mentions the tradition of Prince Abgar in his defense of the veneration of icons. How wonderful and touching is the letter of Abgar to Christ. And since he previously wrote that he heard of His miraculous power, that He cures the sick and since he implored Him to come and to heal him, Abgar further writes: "I also hear that the Jews hate You and that they are preparing some evil against You. I have a city, not large, but beautiful and bountiful in every good: come to me and live with me in my city, which is sufficient for the both of us for every need." Thus wrote a heathen prince while the princes of Jerusalem were preparing death for the Lord, the Lover of Mankind.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate God's wondrous help to Jonathan, the son of Saul (**1 Samuel 13-14 - 1 Kings 13-14**):

1. How the Philistines rose up against the Jews and the army of the Philistines was: **"as the sand which is on the sea shore" (1 Samuel 13:5 - 1 Kings 13:5)**;
2. How Jonathan with his young man that bore his armor [armorbearer], attacked the Philistines, trusting in God and how he confused and defeated them;
3. How even we should know the truthfulness of Jonathan's words: **"It may be the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6 1 Kings 14:6)**.

HOMILY

-About the divine branch from the root of Jesse-

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1).

With such clear prophecies about Christ the Lord, why did not the Jews believe in Him as the Messiah? Because of their insane pride and because of their insane crimes against holy and righteous men. Who is that rod from the stem of Jesse other than the Lord Christ? Jesse was the father of King David and the Messiah was expected from the lineage of David. He appeared from the lineage of David and from Bethlehem, the city of David. The "rod out of the stem of Jesse" signifies the physical descent of the Lord through the Virgin Mary, a descendant of Jesse and David, and the "branch out of his roots" Jesse's roots signifies the revealed righteousness in Him which was trampled down by the many kings from the house of David. Trampled down righteousness is like a dry tree stump. But from the root of such a tree stump, a green branch sometimes sprouts. The Lord Jesus will be such a self-sprouting branch. From His mother, He will be of the lineage of David, by righteousness from the lineage of David but by His Divine Conception, He will be of the Holy Spirit. In eternity from the Father without a mother, in time from a mother without a father. In eternity, the concept of becoming man [incarnation] remained hidden under the covering of Divinity; in time, His Divinity therefore remained hidden under the covering of humanity. Pilate gazed in vain at this "rod from the stem of Jesse" and cried out: **"Behold the Man!" (St. John 19:5)**, the same as when one looks at a wire conveying electrical current among many ordinary wires and cries out: "Behold the wire!" Neither does he recognize electrical current in a wire nor did that one [Pilate] recognize God in man.

O Lord Jesus, Man-kind loving God-man, make us to love God and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST -17-

1. THE HOLY MARTYR MYRON, THE PRESBYTER

Myron was a priest in the town of Achaia of wealthy and prominent origin and by nature was kind and meek, both a lover of God and of man. During the reign of Emperor Decius and, on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, pagans charged into the church, dragged Myron out from the service and subjected him to torture. During the time of torture in the fire, an angel appeared to him and encouraged him. After that, they began to cut his skin in strips from his head to his feet. The martyr grabbed one such strip of his skin and, with it, struck the torturer - the judge - on the face. The judge Antipater, as though possessed, took a sword and killed himself. Finally, they took Myron to the city of Cyzicus and there slew him with the sword in the year 250 A.D.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR PATROCLUS

Patroclus was a citizen of the city of Trychasia, present day Troyes in France [Gaul]. He inherited great wealth from his parents and, from this, as a true Christian, performed daily acts of mercy for the less fortunate while he himself lived a life of mortification taking food only once a day, after the setting of the sun. Because of his sanctity of life, the Lord granted Patroclus the power of healing and he was known throughout as a miracle-worker. Emperor Aurelian, arriving in Gaul, ordered that Patroclus be brought before him. St. Patroclus proclaimed his faith in Christ before the emperor and did not conceal anything. "O Emperor, if you desire something of my wealth, I will give it to you, for I see you as poor" said St. Patroclus to the emperor. To that, the emperor replied: "How is it that you call me the emperor, poor who has countless riches? St. Patroclus then said: "You have only transient earthly treasures but you are poor for you are not in possession of yourself nor do you possess the Faith of Christ in your heart." He was condemned to death and handed over to the soldiers to be taken to a bog near a river to be slain there and to leave his body in the mud. But the saint of God prayed to God that his body not remain in the mud and by the power of God he suddenly became invisible to the soldiers and was translated to the other side of the river. After a long search, the soldiers found him and slew him on a dry spot. Two beggars, to whom Patroclus often gave alms, came along this road, recognized the body of their benefactor and buried it with honors.

3. THE VENERABLE ELIJAH OF CALABRIA [ITALY]

Elijah was a Greek by descent and the abbot of the monastery Mellicia in Calabria in southern Italy. During the time of iconoclasm in the east, many eastern monks fled to Calabria with icons. In time, the monastic life was spread widely throughout Calabria. The Calabrian monks were distinguished by their great learning and austerity of life. At one time, there were so many Orthodox monasteries and monks in Calabria that Calabria was compared with Egypt of old. Later, through the centuries, Orthodox Calabria fell under the authority of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Venerable Elijah died in Thessalonica in the year 903 A.D.

4. THE VENERABLE OLYMPIUS, THE ICONOGRAPHER OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

Portraying the images [faces] of the saints on wood, Olympius imitated even their good works in his own soul. He healed a man of leprosy, saw an angel of God and, in his old age, died peacefully in the Lord in the year 1114 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR PATROCLUS

Patroclus, before the emperor stood erect,
Christ the God, without fear, glorified;
The emperor asked him and Patroclus says:
The wealthy, to the poor should give,
I am wealthy and you O emperor, are poor,
Wealth I possess, only you ask,
Am I poor, who rules the world,
And wealthy are you, with that cursed Faith?
Wealthy I am, Patroclus repeats,
In the fire, my wealth does not burn,
From ages to ages, my wealth is,
In heaven, my wealth awaits me.
What kind of wealth! You are in my hands!
The emperor cried out: To torture will I hand you over,
Hand me over, O emperor, Patroclus replied,
God will reward me my sufferings.
Torture the body; the body is for torture,
Into the hands of the Lord, the spirit I give.
In the Christian, the spirit is free
As in every Christian soldier;
For me, glory and victory awaits
And you O emperor, shame and misfortune,
Upon me, quickly heap tortures
So that my wreath does not fade, O emperor.

REFLECTION

The Lord does not allow His faithful servants to be shamed. It often happened that the martyrs of Christ, ridiculed and mocked before the courts, unexpectedly performed a miracle, which instilled fear in the unbelievers. Either the idols fell or thunder destroyed the temples of the heathen or an unexpected downpour of rain extinguished the fire prepared for their burning or the torturers beat themselves with stones and rods and so forth. Thus, Antipater, the torturer of St. Myron, during the suffering of this man of God suddenly went insane and killed himself. St. Olympius, the iconographer, was already at the end of his life when he received an order from a man to paint [write] the icon of the Dormition [the Falling Asleep The Assumption] of the Most-holy Theotokos. As the feast was approaching, this man came several times to see whether the icon was completed. But the icon was not even begun, not even on the eve of the Feast of the Dormition itself when the icon was supposed to have been placed in the church. When this man returned home completely saddened, at once there appeared a young man in Olympius' cell who immediately sat down and began to write the icon. He worked very quickly and very expertly. When the icon was completed, it shone like the sun. Showing the icon to the astonished Olympius, the young man took the icon and brought it to the church for which it had been ordered. The next day, that man who had ordered the icon went to the church and, to his great surprise, saw the icon in its place. Then that man came to the monastery and, with the abbot, entered Olympius' cell. "How and who wrote the icon of this man?" asked the abbot. The ailing Olympius replied: "An angel wrote it, and he is now standing here to take me away." And with that, he gave up the spirit.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the punishment of God upon Saul because of his disobedience (**1 Samuel 15 - 1 Kings 15**):

1. How God commanded Saul not to spare the Amalekites nor to take any of their livestock;
2. How Saul spared Agag, the Amalekite King, and allowed the best of the enemies livestock to be taken;
3. How Samuel informed Saul that God rejected him because of his disobedience and because of his arbitrary offering of the sacrifice to God without a priest.

HOMILY

-About the Spirit-bearing divine Child-

"And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:2).

The Holy Spirit of God does not separate from the Father nor does it separate from the Son either, nor does the Father separate from the Son and the Spirit, nor does the Son separate from the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit prophesied about the Son through the prophets, the Holy Spirit overshadowed the All-holy Virgin and prepared her for the birth of the Son of God, the Holy Spirit inseparably stood over the Son during the entire time of His visit to the world in the body. The Spirit of Wisdom the Spirit is the vision of heavenly mysteries; The Spirit of Understanding the Spirit is the comprehending of the ties of the visible and invisible world; The Spirit of Counsel the Spirit is the separation of good from evil; The Spirit of Power [Might] the Spirit is the authority over created nature; The Spirit of Knowledge the Spirit is the knowledge of the essence of created beings; The Spirit of the Fear of the Lord the Spirit is the recognizing of the divine power over both worlds and submission to the will of God. Whoever among men had unto himself this fullness of riches of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? No one, ever. Only the Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit distributes His gifts and gives them to men, some to this one and some to another. But, the whole of the undivided fullness of His gifts shines in the Son of God.

Why did the Lord Jesus need to have the fear of God when He Himself is God? As God, He did not have the fear of God but as a man had the fear of God for the sake of an example to us. Just as He fasted, watched and labored as a man for the sake of teaching men, so He feared God as a man for the sake of teaching men. What is more curable for men infected with sin than the fear of God? He, as one Who was healthy had to take unto Himself the medicine for sin so that He could encourage us who are sick to take those medicines. Does not a parent do the same thing with sick children who are afraid to take the prescribed medicine?

O Triune and Eternal God before Whom all the heavenly hosts bow down singing the wondrous hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth receive our worship also and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE JOHN OF RILA

This great ascetic and saint of the Orthodox Church was born near Sophia, Bulgaria in the town of Skrino during the reign of King Boris. He was of poor but honorable parents. After the death of his parents, John was tonsured a monk and withdrew to a mountain wilderness and, began to live a life of strict asceticism in a cave. There, he endured many assaults, both from demons and men, from robbers and his relatives. After this, he moved to the Rila mountain and settled in a hollow tree. He fed only on herbs and broad beans, which, according to God's Providence began to grow in the vicinity. For many years, he did not see a man's face until again, by God's Providence, he was discovered by shepherders who were seeking their lost sheep. Thus, the saint was heard of among the people and they began to come to him seeking help in sickness and in sufferings. The Bulgarian King Peter himself visited John and sought counsel from him. Many who were zealots for the spiritual life settled in the proximity of John. There, a church and monastery was quickly built. St. John rested peacefully in the Lord on August 18, 946 A.D. at the age of seventy. After his death, he appeared to his disciples. At first, his relics were translated to Sophia, then to Hungary, then to Trnovo and finally to the Rila monastery where they repose today. Throughout the centuries, the Rila monastery was a beacon of light, a place of miracle-working power and a spiritual comfort for the Christian people of Bulgaria especially during the difficult times of bondage under the Turks.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS FLORUS AND LAURUS

Florus and Laurus were brothers in the flesh, and in spirit and in vocation. Both were zealous Christians and, by occupation, stonecutters. They lived in Illyria. A pagan prince hired them for the building of a temple to the idols. It happened that during their work, a piece of stone flew and struck the eye of the pagan priest's son who was observing the work of the builders with curiosity. Seeing his son blind and bloody, the pagan priest began to shout at Florus and Laurus and wanted to beat them. Then, the holy brothers said to him that if he would believe in the God in whom they believed, his son would be healed. The pagan priest promised. Florus and Laurus prayed with tears to the one, living, Lord God and traced the sign of the Cross over the child's injured eye. The child was immediately healed and his eye became whole just as it had been. Then the pagan priest Merentius and his son were baptized and, shortly after that, both suffered for Christ by fire. When they completed the temple, Florus and Laurus placed a cross on it, summoned all Christians and consecrated it in the name of the Lord Jesus with an all-night vigil of hymn singing. Hearing of this, the Illyrian deputy burned many of those Christians and threw Florus and Laurus alive in a well and then filled it with dirt. Later, their relics were revealed and translated to Constantinople. These two wonderful brothers suffered and were martyred for Christ and were glorified by Christ in the second century.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR EMILIAN, BISHOP OF TREVI

Emilian was born in Armenia. According to his wishes and seeking martyrdom, he traveled to Italy to preach Christ during the reign of Diocletian. He was elected bishop of Trevi. As a result of the many miracles during the time of his torture, approximately one thousand pagans believed in Christ. He was slain by the sword together with Hilarion, his spiritual father and two brothers, Dionysius and Hermippus.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS FLORUS AND LAURUS

To two sons, two saints, a mother gave birth,
Blessed is such a mother that pleases God.
Wonderful Florus and Laurus, cut the stones,
Along with that, by the Cross, the souls of men corrected;
What a chisel is to stone, a Cross is to the soul,
By the Cross chisled out, for the Cross they perished.
The pagan priest, the unseen miracle saw:
The eye knocked out - the eye healed!
A miracle unseen! For him, that was enough
And with the Cross was baptized and a martyr became.
Wonderful Florus and Laurus, temple of the idols built,
But, in their heart, glorify Christ the God.
The brothers, a new pagan temple built,
But, on it a Cross placed and behold - a Christian temple!
Still, with hymns of praise to Christ, they filled it
And with the beauty of candles and incense pure.
Man to man resembles it in the same way,
But one is humble and the other is flamboyant.
Behold, very similar are they, in body and attire,
But very different in mind and spirit.
In one is Christ and holiness pure,
In the other is the diabolical suffering and emptiness.
That may our body God grant it
To be temples of the Living God, the Spirit
Through the powerful prayers of God's chosen ones.
The brothers Florus and Laurus, holy martyrs.

REFLECTION

It is not a rare occasion, especially in our time, that parents become the culprits for the spiritual death of their children. Whenever a child has an aspiration for the spiritual life, asceticism, monasticism and the parent curtails this aspiration instead of encouraging it, such a parent becomes the murderer of his child. And, such children, as a punishment to their parents, often turn to the opposite side and become perverted. A boy named Luke, the nephew of St. John of Rila, hearing about his uncle and drawn by the desire for the spiritual life, visited his uncle in the mountain. John received Luke with love and began to instruct and to strengthen him in the mortification of asceticism. However, one day Luke's father appeared at the cave of John and furiously began to scold the saint for keeping his son in that wilderness. John's words and counsels were of no avail. The father dragged the son home by force. However, on the way home a serpent bit the boy and Luke died. The cruel father saw in this the punishment of God and repented but it was all too late. He returned to John mourning and condemning himself. But the saint only said to him to bury the child and to return from wherever he came.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate God's wondrous choosing of David as king (**1 Samuel 16 - 1 King 16**):

1. How the Lord instructed Samuel to go to the home of Jesse and anoint one of his sons as king;
2. How the Lord instructed Samuel to anoint David, a herder of sheep, the eighth and youngest son of Jesse;
3. How Samuel anointed David and how the Spirit of God descended upon David.

HOMILY

-About peace between the wolf and the lamb-

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Isaiah 11:6).

Thus, the true prophet foretold the truth. And he further added: **"The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; ...and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isaiah 11:6-7).** And the child will place his hand in the hole of a poisonous snake [asp] and the snake will not harm him. Brethren, when will this wonder occur? This has already occurred when Christ the wonder-worker appeared on earth. This is a reality of Paradise, which was restored among men with the coming of the Savior upon earth. The prophet speaks enigmatically but, nevertheless, clearly; enigmatically, for the prophet does not speak about wild beasts but of men; for his prophecy was clearly fulfilled in Christ's Church. Men, who by their habits, were as wolves, wildcats, lions, bears, oxen, lambs, kids and serpents all stand before the Child of Bethlehem equalized by faith, tamed by grace, illumined by hope and softened by love.

The prophet further foretells why this will take place. **"For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).** When viewed physically, every man is earth. The man who believes in Christ and, in truth follows after Christ, becomes full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea, which is filled with water. Such were many individuals. Such were even entire companies of ascetics in Egypt, on the Holy Mountain [Athos], on Cyprus, in Russia, in Armenia and in other places. But this is not all. The knowledge of the Lord has spread today throughout the earth. Holy Scripture is distributed throughout all nations. There are few corners of the earth where the Gospel of Christ is not read, where the name of God is not known and where the Bloodless Sacrifice of the Lord is not offered. Some deny Christ, others embrace Him, some abandon the true Faith and others embrace the true Faith. And thus continues the one struggle throughout the entire world in the sign of the Lord Jesus. The overly filled waters pour out and flow into empty valleys; the empty valleys become filled and are made equal with the high waters. Everything is not glowing in the world as we Christians wish it to be, but the prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah was gloriously fulfilled most clearly and was accomplished. O how wonderful is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the true prophet. O, miracle-working Lord, tame the beastly nature of those men and people who are not tamed by the power of Your love. That we all may be fruitful from Your abundance. That we all may be glorious from Your Glory and alive Lord, alive from Your Immortal life.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 19 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR ANDREW, STRATELATES [THE TRIBUNE THE COMMANDER]

Andrew was an officer, a tribune, in the Roman army during the reign of Emperor Maximian. He was a Syrian by birth and served in Syria. When the Persians menaced the Roman Empire with their military, Andrew was entrusted with the army to battle against the enemy. During this occasion, Andrew was promoted as a commander - Stratelates. Secretly a Christian, even though he was not baptized, Andrew trusted in the living God and, of the many soldiers, he chose only the best and entered into battle. He said to his soldiers before the battle that if they would call upon the help of the one, true God, Christ the Lord, their enemies will scatter as dust before them. Truly, all the soldiers filled with enthusiasm at Andrew and his faith invoked Christ for assistance and made an assault. The Persian army was utterly destroyed. When the victorious Andrew returned to Antioch some, who were envious, accused Andrew of being a Christian and the imperial deputy summoned him to court. Andrew openly confessed his unwavering faith in Christ. After bitter tortures, the deputy threw Andrew into prison and wrote to the emperor in Rome. Knowing Andrew's respect among the people and in the army, the emperor ordered the deputy to free Andrew to freedom and to seek another opportunity and another reason (not his faith) and then to kill him. Through God's revelation, Andrew learned of the emperor's command and, taking with him his faithful soldiers, 2593 in number, departed with them to Tarsus in Cilicia and there, all were baptized by Bishop Peter. Persecuted even there by the imperial authorities, Andrew with his detachment withdrew farther into the Armenian mountain Tavros. Here, in a ravine while they were at prayer, the Roman army caught up with them and all to the last one were beheaded. Not one of them even wanted to defend themselves but all were desirous of a martyr's death for Christ. On this spot, where a stream of the martyr's blood flowed, a spring of healing water erupted which cured many from every disease. Bishop Peter came secretly with his people and, on the same spot, honorably buried the bodies of the martyrs. Dying honorably, they were all crowned with the wreath of glory and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Christ our Lord.

2. THE VENERABLE THEOPHANES

Theophanes was born in Ioannia and, as a young man, left all and went to Mt. Athos where he was tonsured a monk in the community of Dochiariu. He was an example to all the monks in fasting, prayer, all-night vigils and depriving himself of all that was unnecessary. In time, and because of this, he was elected as abbot. Later, because of some misunderstanding with the monks, he left Mt. Athos and, with his nephew, went to Berea [Beroea] in Macedonia where he established a monastery in honor of the All-holy Theotokos. When this monastery blossomed with the spiritual life, Theophanes entrusted his nephew to govern it and he went to Naousa where he established another monastery in honor of the Holy Archangels. Theophanes died peacefully in the fifteenth century. His miracle-working relics, even now, repose in Naousa and manifest the great power of God.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS TIMOTHY, AGAPIUS AND THECLA

All three were martyred for Christ during the reign of the wicked Emperor Diocletian. Timothy was burned alive and Agapius and Thecla were thrown before wild beasts.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR ANDREW, STRATELATES [THE TRIBUNE]

The nature's song in the midst of Mt. Tavros
Echoed without a loud human response.
Until one day, the mountain shook,
Some new echo, through her was carried;
And the mountain, its eternal echo halted
In order to hear the new, which it had not in ages, heard.
There, the end of the brave detachment of Andrew was,
There, the wolves, the innocent lambs slaughtered;
Andrew, from the Persians, the Empire of Rome saved,
And now, against Andrew, the Roman army roar,
With two-thousand companions, Andrew to the earth knelt,
To his companions, good advice he spoke:
Now is the pleasant hour, now is the day of salvation,
From the earthly life, our separation.
On our knees humbly before God, let us kneel,
And for much good, let us warmly give thanks,
And mostly brethren, for a martyr's death
Without anger and shouting against the murderous hand.
Thus, Andrew spoke. To their knees they fell,
Two-thousand men, began to pray;
Of the bitter pursuers, swords flashing
Atop the mountain, choirs of angels shone,
The doors of Paradise, in heaven opened
For Andrew holy, the glorious Stratelates
And his army, who evil overcame
And for their Christ, shed honorable blood.

REFLECTION

When an unexpected misfortune happens to us who are innocent, we should not immediately grieve but rather we should try to see in this the Providence of God, Who, through that misfortune, is preparing something new and beneficial for us. One day, unexpected news came to Blessed Theophanes, the abbot of Dochiariu, that the Turks had seized his sister's son, forced him to embrace Islam and took him to Constantinople. Theophanes immediately traveled to Constantinople and, with the help of God, succeeded to find his nephew and to secretly bring him out of Constantinople and brought him to his monastery on Mt. Athos. There, he again, received his nephew into the Christian Faith and, after that, also tonsured him a monk. However, the brethren began to complain against their abbot and his nephew for fear of the Turks, for they were afraid that the Turks would find out and come and destroy the monastery. Not knowing what to do, St. Theophanes took his nephew and, with him, secretly withdrew not only from Dochiariu but also from the Holy Mountain and came to Berea. The later activities of Theophanes in Berea and in Naousa proved how much that misfortune was beneficial to the Church. That which Theophanes could never succeed to achieve on the Holy Mountain, he achieved in these other places to which he had fled from that misfortune. Namely: he founded two new monasteries, where, in time, many monks were saved and where countless men found comfort for themselves. In addition to this, his holy relics among the Christian people became a source of healing for the strengthening of faith among many unbelievers and those of little faith. Thus, God wisely directs the destiny of men through unexpected misfortunes, which momentarily seem to men that they are going to their final destruction.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the wondrous Providence of God in the life of David (**1 Samuel 16 - 1 Kings 16**):

1. How the Spirit of God withdrew from Saul because of Saul's sin;
2. How an evil spirit assaulted Saul so that he sought a harpist in order to comfort him;
3. How the servants of the king precisely found David and brought him to the king so as to calm him with the harp.

HOMILY

-About the power of the Lord and the weakness of idols-

"Behold, the Lord rideth upon a light cloud and shall come into Egypt: And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence" (Isaiah 19:1).

Fleeing from King Herod, the Pharaoh of Jerusalem, the Lord came to Egypt. The true Israel is not reckoned according to the place but rather according to the spirit and deeds. At the time of the birth of the Lord, greater evil [Herod] reigned in Jerusalem than ever reigned in the Egypt of the Pharaohs as it often happens when believers fall away from the Faith, they become worse than the unbelievers who never knew the true Faith. Such is the case in our days with the rulers in Russia who apostatized from Christ. At that time, Egypt was a kinder and more hospitable place for the Savior of the world than was Jerusalem. Compare the words of the prophet with the words of the angel in a dream to the Righteous Joseph: **"Arise, and take the young Child and His mother and flee into Egypt" (St Matthew 2:13)** and immediately you will be convinced that the words of Isaiah do not refer to anyone other than Christ the Lord. You will be convinced of this even more when you hear the words of the other prophet who speaks: **"Out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11: 1).**

What does **"a light cloud"** upon which He [the Lord] will come to Egypt signify? This signifies the body of the Lord in which He will clothe His divinity, for the body of man is as a dense cloud in which the soul resides. Therefore, that is the prophetic vision of the Incarnate Lord. Some interpreters also think that **"a light cloud"** signifies the Most-pure Mother of God who, by long fasting and prayer and other mortifications made her body as light as a cloud. Especially **"light was that cloud"** the body of the Birth-giver of God because of the absence of passions, which burden the human body.

O, All-merciful Lord, Who desires salvation for all mankind and does not look to see who is a Jew and who is an Egyptian, save and have mercy on us for we continuously hope in Your Name.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET SAMUEL

Samuel was the fifteenth and last judge of Israel. He lived eleven hundred years before Christ. Samuel was born of the tribe of Levi of the parents Elkanah and Hannah in a place called Ramatha or Arimathea where the noble Joseph was born [Joseph of Arimathea]. The barren Hannah besought Samuel from God through weeping and dedicated him to God when he was three years of age. Living in Shiloh near the Ark of the Covenant, Samuel, in his twelfth year, had a true revelation from God concerning the punishments which were pending before the house of the high priest Eli because of the immorality of his sons Hophni and Phineas. That revelation soon materialized: the Philistines defeated the Israelites, slew both of Eli's sons and captured the Ark of the Covenant. When the messenger informed Eli of this tragedy, he fell dead to the ground and expired in the ninety-eighth year of his life. The same thing occurred to his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phineas. From then on and for twenty years the Israelites were the slaves of the Philistines. After this period of time, God sent Samuel to the people to preach repentance if they wished to be saved from their enemies. The people repented and rejected the foreign idols that they served and recognized Samuel as a prophet, priest and judge. Then Samuel set out with an army against the Philistines and with God's help confused and defeated them and liberated the land and the people. After that, Samuel peacefully judged his people until old age. Seeing him in old age, the people asked him to install a king for them in his place. In vain Samuel tried to turn the people away from this, saying to them that God is their only King but the people stood by their demands. Even though this demand was not pleasing to God, God commanded Samuel to anoint Saul, the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, as their king. Saul reigned for a short time only and God rejected Saul because of his impudence and disobedience and then commanded Samuel to anoint Jesse's son David as king in Saul's place. Before his death, Samuel gathered the entire people and bid them farewell. When Samuel died all of Israel mourned for him and they buried him honorably in his house at Ramatha.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR PHILIP, BISHOP OF HERAKLION, WITH SEVERUS, THE PRESBYTER, AND HERMES, THE DEACON

According to all probability, it appears that they were Slavs. They served God in Thrace and there were first handed over to tortures for Christ. When the pagans rushed to set fire to a Christian church, the brave Philip said to their elder: "Do you think that God is enclosed in these walls? He lives in our hearts." The church was destroyed, all the books burned and these priests were taken to Jedrene where, after imprisonment and tortures, were thrown half burned into the Maritsa river. Thirty-eight more Christians also died with them as martyrs. It is thought that they suffered and died during the reign of Diocletian.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROPHET SAMUEL

Samuel the righteous, servant of the Living God,
Of his people, beloved judge,
He respected God; God above all,
The will of God, for him, was a commandment,
By the will of God, the will of the people he corrected
And for the people's sins, before God repented.
Priest and prophet and a righteous judge,
In three ways, Samuel glorified God.
With his every word, with his every deed,
Through labor and prayer and sacrifices and food
With his entire being, God he served,
To the rulers of the world, this example he offered:
For his people, no one is going to do good,
One who from the law of God departs
Who, to himself and to the people listen and not God,
Into the depth of the bottomless abyss will fall.
As Saul fell and others with him
All accomplices of the sin of the people.
Only a slave of God can a ruler be
And benefit his people eternally
This Samuel teaches in deeds and in words,
Throughout the many centuries, this teaching echoes.

REFLECTION

Repent before death closes the door of your life and opens the door of judgement. Repent before death and since you do not know the hour of death, repent today, even now, and cease to repeat your sin. Thus, St. Ephrem the Syrian prays:

Before the wheel of time stops in my life, have mercy on me;
Before the wind of death blows and diseases, the heralds of death,
appear on my body, have mercy on me;
Before the majestic sun in the heights becomes darkened for me,
Have mercy on me; and may Your light shine for me from on high
and disperse the dreadful darkness of my mind;
Before the earth returns to earth and becomes decay and before
the destruction of all the features of its beauty, have mercy;
Before my sins deceive me at the judgment and shame me before
The Judge, have mercy O Lord, filled with gentleness;
Before the hosts come forth, preceding the Son of the King to
assemble our miserable race before the throne of the Judge, have mercy,
Before the voice of the trumpet sounds before Your coming, spare
Your servants and have mercy, O Lord our Jesus;
Before You lock Your door before me, O Son of God, and before
I become food for the unquenchable fires of Gehenna, have mercy on me."

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the wondrous victory of David over Goliath (**1 Samuel 17 - 1 Kings 17**):

1. How Goliath, frightful in body, armor and weapon defied the entire army of Israel;
2. How David, with hope in God, came with a slingshot and stones and slew Goliath;
3. How David was victorious for he believed **"the battle is the Lord's"** (**1 Samuel 17:47 - 1 Kings 17:47**), a battle of believers against unbelievers.

HOMILY

-About Egypt's conversion to the Lord-

"And the Lord shall be known to Egypt and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yes, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord and perform it" (Isaiah 19:21).

O how changeable is the heart of man! But, of all of his changes, one is more shameful than the most shameful and that is: when a believer becomes an unbeliever. Of all his changes, one is more glorious than the most glorious and that is: when the unbeliever converts and becomes a believer. The first change occurred with the Israelites who killed Christ and the other occurred with the Egyptians who believed in Christ. At one time, Egypt was the greatest persecutor of those who believed in the one, living God, for at one time, the Egyptians had many lifeless gods, idols and things that they worshipped, fables and soothsayers by which they were deceived. But behold what the prophet fortells! What a wonderful vision! The Egyptians will recognize the one and the living Lord at the time when the Lord appears in the flesh among mankind. Idols will be destroyed, the temples of the demons and animals will be overthrown and the altar of oblation of the Living and one God will be established and raised up. The Bloodless Sacrifice will be offered in place of the bloody sacrifice and the rational in place of the irrational. Hundreds and thousands of monks will take upon themselves the vows of poverty, obedience, fasting, and prayer out of love for the Lord. The greatest ascetics will appear in this once darkened Egypt; the bravest martyrs for Christ the Lord; the most enlightened minds; the most discerning miracle-workers. O, what a wonderful vision! And how wonderful is the realization of that vision! St. Chrysostom writes: "Neither the sun, with its multitude of stars, is not as glowing as much as the wilderness of Egypt with all of its monks." All was realized in truth, that was foreseen and foretold by Isaiah, the son of Amos, the discerning and true prophet.

O compassionate Lord who showed mercy on Egypt, the one time persecutor of Your faithful, and illumined it with the light of truth, illumine us also and strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit and by the example of the great Christians of Egypt.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE THADDAEUS

Thaddaeus was one of the Seventy Apostles but not the Thaddaeus who was one of the Twelve Apostles. St. Thaddaeus first saw and heard John the Baptist and received baptism from him and after that he saw the Lord Jesus and followed Him. The Lord numbered him among the seventy lesser apostles whom He sent two by two before His face, **"After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place where He Himself would come" (St. Luke 10:1).** After His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, the Lord sent Thaddaeus to Edessa, Thaddaeus' birthplace, according to the promise He gave to Prince Abgar at the time when He sent the towel with His face on it. By kissing the towel, Abgar was healed of leprosy but not completely. A little leprosy still remained on his face. When St. Thaddaeus appeared to Abgar, he received him with great joy. The apostle of Christ instructed him in the true faith and after that baptized him. When the baptized Abgar came out of the water, the remaining leprosy fell from him and he was completely healed. Glorifying God, Prince Abgar also wanted that his people should know the true God and to glorify Him. The prince assembled all the citizens of Edessa before the holy Apostle Thaddaeus to hear teaching about Christ. Hearing the words of the apostle and seeing their prince miraculously healed, the people rejected the idols, unclean living, embraced the Faith of Christ and were baptized. Thus, the city of Edessa was illumined by the Faith of Christ. Prince Abgar brought much gold and offered it to the apostle but Thaddaeus said to him: " Since we left our own gold, how can we receive the gold of others?" St. Thaddaeus preached the Gospel throughout Syria and Phoenicia. He reposed in the Lord in the Phoenician city of Beirut.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR BASSA AND HER CHILDREN: THEOGNIUS, AGAPIUS AND PISTUS

Bassa was the wife of an idolatrous pagan priest but also was secretly a Christian. She educated her sons in the spirit of Christianity. Her husband hated her because of her faith and handed her, along with her, sons, over to the judge for torturing. After harsh tortures, her sons were beheaded (thought to be Edessa in Macedonia). Bassa was completely overjoyed when she saw how her sons honorably ended their martyr's heroic deed for Christ and she herself, with even greater eagerness, went from torture to torture. When they tossed Bassa into the sea, angels appeared to her and brought her to an island in the Sea of Marmara where she was beheaded at the time of Maximian. Thus, was St. Bassa, in a two-fold manner, was made worthy of the Kingdom of Christ, as a martyr and as a mother of martyrs.

3. VENERABLE ABRAHAM OF SMOLENSK

Abraham was born in the town of Smolensk in answer to his parent's prayers. He entered the monastic life at an early age and gave himself to austere asceticism, emulating the ancient fathers of the desert. Later, he established the monastery of the Holy Cross near Smolensk. He endured many temptations both from demons and men with great patience and thanksgiving to God. During the time of a great drought, Abraham brought forth rain by his prayers. Living fifty years in the monastic order, Abraham peacefully died in the Lord about 1220 A.D.

4. THE HOLY FOREFATHERS ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Forefathers before Christmas as the righteous and chosen ones of God.

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE ABRAHAM OF SMOLENSK

The candle burns and incense smells,
Day and night, Abraham prays
His neighbors, he loves as himself.
Withered body of St. Abraham
From fasting and prostrations,
Heart trembling, from the Name of God -
On the pages of time, eternity he writes
Of the sinner, sinners are not afraid
But, the righteous ones, they bitterly fear,
Sinful men, Abraham mock
Envious ones, Abraham accuse.
Mocked and accused, Abraham endures,
For his foes, the mercy of God he implores.
Abraham his heart conceals
Secretly kneeling, secretly shedding tears;
God does not judge as men judge,
The judgment of man desires to harm
But God desires salvation for all,
The aristocrat and the helpless slave.
In God, the saint places all his hope
Abraham, God eternally glorified.

REFLECTION

Magnanimous forgiveness of slanderers and prayer for them is a characteristic of Christian saints who do not ascribe all the slanders against themselves to men but rather to demons, the main instigators of every slander as well as every sin in general. St. Abraham of Smolensk was slandered by envious priests to the prince and the bishop as a deceiver, magician and hypocrite. The slanders sought nothing less than to have him burned. The prince and the bishop believed the slanderers and Abraham was banished from Smolensk and was forbidden to exercise his priestly functions. During the entire time of his investigation and trial, Abraham repeated the prayer of St. Stephen, the first martyr: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts of the Apostles 7:60). Later it was established that all of the accusers against Abraham lied and slandered. The infuriated prince wanted to severely punish the slanderers and the bishop wanted to excommunicate them from the Church but the holy Abraham fell on his knees before the bishop and, with tears, begged him to forgive them. Abraham did not want to return to his monastery nor to begin again to exercise his priestly functions until his slanderers were shown mercy and released.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate David and Saul, a man with the spirit of God and a man without the spirit of God (**1 Samuel 18 - 1 Kings 18**):

1. How Saul feared David because of his virtues and how David was obedient to Saul in everything;
2. How Saul hypocritically rewarded David but sent him among the Philistines so that he would be killed;
3. How an apostate from God always fears the most godly man.

HOMILY

-About the wondrous stone in Zion-

"Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believes in it shall not be ashamed" (Isaiah 28:16).

Brethren, this wondrous stone is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For if the prophet thought of it as an ordinary stone, he would not have mentioned faith in it [the stone], otherwise he would have prophesied idolatry. The Prophet Daniel also speaks about a stone which rolled down the hill and smashed the great idol and grew as a great mountain and filled the whole earth: **"Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were made of iron and clay and broke them into pieces...and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34-35).** The prophecy about the stone in Daniel is for pagans and the prophecy about the stone in Isaiah is for Jews. The Lord Jesus Christ is that stone which is laid first, in the foundation of God's entire creation, for He is the Word of God and the Wisdom of God; second, as the foundation of the Old Testament as the preparation and third, as the foundation of the New Testament as the fulfillment. The "corner-stone", that is the firmest and the strongest stone which connects and joins other stones and holds the walls of various directions [angels] in oneness and in wholeness. If we observe the Lord Christ within us, He is the "corner-stone" which binds and ties our various spiritual capabilities in unity and wholeness so that all work toward one goal, in the direction of God and the Kingdom of God. If we observe Christ the Lord in the history of mankind, He is the "corner-stone" which ties and binds Judaism and paganism in one House of God, in the Church of God. **"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 3:11)** says the apostle of the New Testament in agreement with the prophet of the Old Testament. Whoever has, until now, believed in that Stone of Salvation was not ashamed. Neither will anyone ever be ashamed who would believe in it. For this stone is a "sure foundation" and truly a "chosen stone", a "precious and honorable stone".

O Lord Jesus, our Stone of Salvation, strengthen the faith in us, that holy and salvatory faith in You, our only Savior.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS AGATHONICUS, ZOTICUS AND OTHERS WITH THEM

St. Agathonicus was a citizen of Nicomedia and a Christian by faith. With great zeal he converted the Hellenes from idolatry and instructed them in the true Faith. By order of Emperor Maximian, the emperor's deputy cruelly persecuted the Christians. During the persecution, the deputy captured St. Zoticus in a place called Carpe, crucified his disciples and brought Zoticus to Nicomedia where he also captured and bound St. Agathonicus, Princeps, Theoprepus, (Bogoljepa), Acindynus, Severianus, Zeno and many others. Securely bound, they were all taken to Byzantium. However, along the way, Saints Zoticus, Theoprepus and Acindynus died of their many wounds and exhaustion. They killed Severianus near Chalcedon and, Agathonicus with the others were taken to Thrace to the town of Silybria where, after torture before the emperor himself, they were beheaded and entered into eternal life and into the joy of their Lord.

2. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR EULALIA

During the time of a terrible persecution against Christians in Spain, there lived a virgin Eulalia, born of Christian parents in the town of Barcelona. Completely dedicated to Christ as her Bridegroom, completely immersed in Holy Scripture, Eulalia ceaselessly disciplined herself in voluntary mortification of the body and spirit. When the torturer Dacian who mercilessly killed the Christians throughout Spain and then came to Barcelona, Eulalia slipped away from her parents at night, came before the torturer and in the presence of many people rebuked him for slaughtering innocent people, along with this ridiculing the lifeless idols and openly confessing her faith in Christ the living Lord. The enraged Dacian ordered that Eulalia be disrobed and beaten with rods. But the holy virgin expressed that she did not feel the pains of the tortures for her Christ. The torturer then bound her to a piece of wood in the form of a cross and ordered that her body be burned with torches. Then the torturer asked her: "Where is your Christ now to save you?" Eulalia answered: "He is here with me but you are unable to see Him because of your impurity." In great pain did Eulalia give up her soul to God. When she died, the people saw a white dove emerge from her mouth. At that moment, snow unexpectedly fell and covered the naked body of the martyr as a white garment. The third day, St. Felix came and sadly wept before Eulalia's hanging body and on the lifeless face of the saint there appeared a smile. Her parents came and, together with other Christians, honorably buried the body of this holy virgin. Eulalia suffered and died for her Lord and entered into eternal joy at the beginning of the fourth century.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR ANTHUSA AND OTHERS WITH HER

Anthusa was the daughter of wealthy but pagan parents from Seleucia in Syria. Learning about Christ, Anthusa believed in Him with all her heart and secretly went to Bishop Athanasius who baptized her. At the time of her baptism, angels of God appeared to her. After that, Anthusa set out for the wilderness to live a life of asceticism for she was afraid to return to her parents. Anthusa lived a life of asceticism in the wilderness for twenty-three years. While praying to God, she gave up her soul kneeling on a stone under which, according to her last testament, she wished to be buried. Bishop Athanasius and two of Anthusa's servants, Charismus and Neophytus, were slain after that because of their faith in Christ at the time of Emperor Valerian about the year 257 A.D. They all died honorably and were crowned with wreaths.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR EULALIA

God's white dove,
And martyr of Christ,
Eulalia, torture desires,
That by torture, to whiten the spirit.
What is the body? A potter's weak clay,
When, from it, the soul breaks forth,
To its own dust, dust returns,
The soul, to the angelic world.
Eulalia bears Christ.
Without sighing, tortures she endures,
Tortures endures, prays to God,
The torturer, to withstand.
And, the dove withstood,
And the martyr conquered.
Her body wounded,
By white snow is covered,
The soul a dove from within her, flies,
To her Creator, it flies,
On her lifeless face,
By white snow covered,
Behold, the smile of the victor,
Behold, the smile of the avenger!
With a smile, she found
And a new life proclaimed.
By the prayers of Eulalia
That God also have mercy on us!

REFLECTION

When a man once truly repents, he need not think any more about the sins he committed so that he will not sin again. St. Anthony counsels: "Be careful that your mind not be defiled with the remembrance of former sins and that the remembrance of those sins not be renewed in you." Again, in another place, St. Anthony says: "Do not establish your previously committed sins in your soul by thinking about them so that they not be repeated in you. Be assured that they are forgiven you from the time that you gave yourself to God and repentance. In that, do not doubt." It is said of St. Ammon that he attained such perfection that from much goodness he was not aware that evil exists anymore. When they asked him what is that **"narrow and difficult [sorrowful] path"** (St. Matthew 7:14), he replied: "That it is the restraining of one's thoughts and severing of one's desires in order to fulfill the will of God." Whoever restrains sinful thoughts, does not think of his own sins or the sins of others neither of anything corruptible nor of anything earthly. The mind of such a man is continually in heaven where there is no evil. Thus, in him, sin gradually ceases to be, even in his thoughts.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the wondrous help of God to David (**1 Samuel 19 - 1 Kings 19**):

1. How David played the harp before Saul;
2. How an evil spirit attacked Saul and Saul hurled a spear at David in order to kill him;
3. How Saul, even from the closest distance, did not hit David.

HOMILY

-About the prophecy of the miracles of Christ-

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isaiah 35: 5-6).

Come, brethren, let us be amazed at the power of our living God Who opened the eyes of mortal men to see in the greatest distance of time that which will come to pass. And still to see in the minutest details as though this prophet [Isaiah] himself was an apostle of Christ, walked with the Lord, witnessed the miracles of miracles, how he gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the lame to walk and to the dumb, voice and speech. When John the Baptist in prison sent his disciples to ask Christ: **"Are You He who is to come or do we look for another?" (St. Matthew 11:3)**, the Lord Christ answered them in the words of His prophet Isaiah: **"Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up "** (St. Matthew 11: 4-5).

Look and see how wonderful the Lord planned our salvation! That which was prophesied about Him through His Prophet Isaiah, that is what He fulfilled. At one time, the Prophet Isaiah spoke His words inspired by the Holy Spirit and now He [Jesus Christ] speaks the words of His prophet. At one time, the prophet quoted Him and now He [Jesus Christ] quotes the prophet. To show by this that when He speaks His words or when He speaks the words of the prophet, He always speaks only His words. To show that even then it was He who spoke and not the prophet and that it is now He who speaks and not anyone else and to justify His prophet as His faithful servant so that no one would be able to say that the prophet spoke falsely. Thus, the prophets served to the glory of Christ the Lord and Christ the Lord glorified His prophets, His true servants.

O Lord Jesus, glorified by Your servants and the Glorifier of Your servants, help us also so that by word, deed and thoughts we may be able to serve the majestic glory of Your Name.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR LUPUS

This holy man Lupus was a servant of St. Demetrius the commander of Thessalonica. When Emperor Maximian beheaded St. Demetrius, Lupus dipped the hem of his garment and his ring in the blood of the martyr. With this garment and ring, Lupus worked many miracles in Thessalonica, healing people of every pain and infirmity. Emperor Maximian, who was then still residing in Thessalonica, discovered this and ordered that Lupus be tortured and killed. However, the soldiers who took up weapons against Lupus turned against one another and severely wounded themselves. As he was not yet baptized, even though he was a Christian, Lupus prayed to God that He would somehow plan his baptism before his death. At that moment, rain unexpectedly fell from the clouds upon this holy martyr and thus he received baptism from on high. After great sufferings, Lupus was beheaded and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR POTHINUS, THE BISHOP OF LYON

Pothinus was sent by St. Polycarp from Asia Minor to preach in Gaul [France]. He became the first bishop of Lyon and converted many pagans to Christianity. During the time of the persecution of the Christians in the year 177A.D., Pothinus was brought to trial: more correctly, he was carried [in the arms of others] for he was ninety years old. The Pro-consul asked him: "Who is the Christian God?" The aged Pothinus replied: "You will know if you become worthy of that." The pagans attacked him with canes and stones and beat him without mercy. Thrown into prison, St. Pothinus died from the beatings two days later and took up habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR IRENAEUS, THE BISHOP OF LYON

In his youth, Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostles, who sent him to preach in Gaul. Following the martyrdom of St. Pothinus, Irenaeus was installed as bishop. In his countless writings, Irenaeus at times defined the Orthodox Faith and, again at times, he defended it from heretics. Irenaeus was martyred and died for Christ at the time of Emperor Severus in the year 202 A.D. along with many thousands of Christians (19,000).

4. SAINT VICTOR

Saint Victor suffered and died in Marseilles [France] in the third century. After prolonged and bitter tortures, he was cast into prison where he converted the guards to the Faith of Christ. He died by crucifixion.

5. SAINT ALBAN

Alban was an English nobleman. At the time of persecution, he concealed a Christian priest in his home and was taught the Faith of Christ by him. Alban gave his clothing to the priest and then he dressed as a priest and gave himself up to the torturers. Sentenced to death, he converted his executioner to the Faith of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT POLYCARP SAINT IRENAEUS SAINT POTHINUS

Most beautiful is the vine with fruitful branches,
With fragrant fruit, noble fruit;
In his offspring, the parent is wonderful,
Of physical marriage, sons are the glory.
But, more beautiful than the vine and the fruitful marriage
Are the spiritual children of the Holy Spirit.
Polycarp most glorious, had two sons:
Saint Irenaeus and Saint Pothinus,
To him, two children of the spirit and not of the flesh, were they,
With unfading eternal glory crowned.
By the Spirit of God, Polycarp regenerated them,
And for that, more beloved to him were they than if he gave birth to them.
Raised them both, with wisdom he equipped them,
To preach in Gaul, he prepared them both.
Two chosen sacrifices, two pure lambs,
Gave to the slaughter, for the Crucified Christ
Of the New Zion, two wise heralds,
Of baptized Lyon, two courageous bishops
Irenaeus and Pothinus glorified God
And Polycarp, their spiritual father.
Heroically they stood, as martyrs fell,
And, before the benevolent Christ, they stood crowned.

REFLECTION

Mysterious is the power of the Cross no matter how unexplainable, it is true and indisputable. Yet, St. John Chrysostom speaks of the custom of his time that the sign of the cross is attached "on the emperor's diadem, on the accouterments of the soldiers and tracing it on parts of the body: the head, the breast [chest] and the heart and also on the table of oblations and over beds." "If it is necessary to expel demons", says he, "we use the cross and it also helps to heal the sick." 'St. Benedict made the sign of the cross over a glass which contained poison and the glass burst as though it were struck by a stone. St. Julian made the sign of the cross over a glass of poison brought to him and drank the poison, but he did not feel any pain in his body. The Holy Female Martyr Basilissa of Nicomedia enveloped herself with the sign of the cross, stood amidst the flames and remained unharmed. The Holy Martyrs Audon and Senis crossed themselves when the wild beasts were released on them and the beasts became docile and meek as lambs. Among the ascetics of old, as it is today, the sign of the cross was the most powerful weapon against the temptations of the demons. The most horrible fears of the devil vanish into nothing, as smoke, when man traces the sign of the cross over himself. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself willed to the one time sign of crime and shame, the Cross, following His crucifixion on the wood of the cross, all victorious power and might.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the rapid advancing evil in the soul of Saul from the moment he turned away from God (1 Samuel 22 - 1 Kings 22):

1. How he hurled a spear at David;
2. How he hurled a spear at his son Jonathan;
3. How he slew eighty-five priests in one day, suspecting that they were aligned with David;
4. How, in every time and with every unrepented sin against God, many other sins are drawn in.

HOMILY

-About John the Precursor [the Forerunner] and how Isaiah prophesied concerning him-

**"The voice of him that cries in the wilderness:
Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the
desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3).**

When a king wants to visit a certain place, he sends before him in advance his heralds. To an unusual king an unusual herald is appropriate. The herald of Christ the King in the wilderness was Moses; in Jerusalem, the Prophets; in Nazareth, the Archangel; in Bethlehem, the Magi of the East; on the Jordan, John. Not one king in the history of mankind has had such heralds. St. John the Baptist was also as unusual and special as were the other heralds of Christ. He was the voice crying in the two-fold wilderness: in the wilderness of Jordan and in the human wilderness. Just as the wilderness of Jordan was fruitless and dry, so the wilderness of the human spirit, was unfruitful and dry. John was not able to make the human wilderness green and fruitful, but he cleared and plowed it and, in that way, was preparing the earth and leveled it [the earth] for the great Sower Who, by His coming, brings with Him the seed and the rain to sow the seed of knowledge and the rain of grace from on high to make it green and be fruitful. By repentance, John prepared the way and by baptism in water, made the path straight. The way and the paths these are the souls of men. By repentance, the souls of men were prepared to receive the seed of Christ and by baptism in water to bury that seed deep in the earth of their heart. The proud and the lowly when they are immersed naked in the water are all as one, equal in their nothingness before the majesty of the All-glorious Christ the Savior: **"Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low" (Isaiah 40:4).** The word here is not about earthly valleys and hills but of lowly and proud men. As corpses in the grave are all the same before the eyes of a living man, thus all sinners, lowly and proud, slaves and masters are equal before the living God.

Such a wondrous vision was seen by Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of the living God, the one and true God.

O Lord, Heavenly King, to Whom the heavenly hosts worship day and night, look down once again upon our nothingness and because of Your humiliation and passion for us, save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR EUTYCHES

Eutyches was one of the lesser apostles and was born in Sebastopol. He was a disciple and imitator of the Apostle John the Theologian and the Apostle Paul. Even though he is not numbered among the seventy apostles, nevertheless, he is called an apostle because he was a disciple of the great apostles and, because in his evangelical service, he displayed true apostolic zeal. Consecrated a missionary bishop, St. Eutyches traveled much, having, an angel as his companion. In prison, he received heavenly bread from an angel. When his body was scrapped with a serrated iron rod, blood flowed from him with unusual fragrant myrrh. He was thrown into a fire and before wild beasts and finally beheaded with a sword in Sebastopol.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR TATION

By descent, Tation was from Mantinaeas near Claudioupolis in Bithnyia. He suffered at the time of Diocletian. After great tortures he was buried alive and thus gave up his holy soul to God.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR SYRA

Syra was a kinswoman of St. Mary Golinduc (July 12). She was a Persian from the town of Hirhaselevkosa and the daughter of a eminent fire-worshipping pagan priest. Reared in paganism, the virgin Syra learned of Christ from poor Christian women and her heart became inflamed with love for the Lord. During an illness and while she was yet unbaptized, Syra sought dust from the church of a Christian priest but the priest refused for she was yet unbaptized. Then, with great faith, she touched the vestments of the priest and was healed. That miraculous healing confirmed her even more in the Faith of Christ. But her soul-less father handed her over to harsh tortures during which she received courage and comfort from heavenly visions. She was strangled with a rope by force and then drowned in the year 558 A.D. during the time of the Persian Emperor Chozroesi I at the age of eighteen. And so this holy virgin gloriously finished her earthly journey and took up habitation in the heavenly angelic habitation.

4. VENERABLE ARSENIUS OF KOMEL

Arsenius was born in Moscow of noble birth. As a youth he received monasticism in the monastery of St. Sergius of Radonez. As an exemplary monk, Arsenius was elected abbot but he yearned for prayerful solitude and withdrew to the forest of Komel where, he lived a life of asceticism until his death, struggling bravely with great temptations of the demons. He rested in the Lord in the year 1550 A.D.

5. SAINT GREGORY LIMNIOTES (OF THE LAKE)

Gregory was a confessor and a great ascetic of Olympus. He died at the age of ninety-five at the time of the Iconoclasts, 716 A.D. *

* In the great Greek Synaxarion, St. Dionysius, the Archbishop of Aegina who died in 1624 A.D. is also mentioned and from whose relics numerous miracles were manifested.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR SYRA

As young as the dew but, in wisdom, old
Rich in faith, hope and meekness,
Syra the Persian, a model Christian,
To God prayed, at night before dawn;
By prayers, Syra, her soul rejoiced,
By prayers she, her soul enriched,
At the father's hearth, in darkness and sorrow,
In grief and blood of a combatant field,
By prayers, Syra her heart rejoiced.
Of the peace of Christ, joyful and full.
Against Syra, kingdom and pagan priests were,
And for Syra, Christ and the honorably clergy.
In the dungeon dark, at prayer vigilant,
In a wondrous light, Syra glowed.
That is the light of Paradise, darkened by sin.
And returned to the faithful, by the Cross of Christ.
Whoever the Cross takes upon himself, that light receives,
From the light of the soul, the face also glows:
Syra, as a true star shown,
And through death, to the bosom of Christ hurried.

REFLECTION

If you were to ask many people why they do not go to Church to pray, they will generally answer you: I have no time, I have to work! Just look at those people who only work and do not go to Church, placing their trust only in their work and compare them with those who divide their time between work and prayer and you will quickly be convinced that the latter are more well off and, what is more important, they are more satisfied. It is said about two neighboring tailors how unequal they were according to their work and prayer and according to their wealth and satisfaction. One of them had a large family and the other was a bachelor. The first had the habit of going to church every morning for prayer and the bachelor never went to church. Not only did the first work less but was even less a skillful master than the other. He had enough of everything and the other lacked everything. The first one asked the other how is it that he has everything although he works less? The one who prays to God [Bogomoljac a devout person] responded that he attends church every day and, along the way, finds lost gold and he invited his neighbor, the bachelor, to go with him to prayer and they will share the discovered gold. Both neighbors began to attend church regularly and soon both became equal in abundance as well as in satisfaction. Naturally, they found no gold along the way but the blessing of God multiplies the abundance of true devout men. Those who: **"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (St. Matthew 6:31)**, God adds and multiplies all that is necessary for their physical life.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the providence of God which protected David from falling into the hands of Saul (**1 Samuel 23 - 1 Kings 23**):

1. How Saul came to besiege the city of Keliath [Celia] where David was but God revealed this to David and David fled beforehand;
2. How Saul almost captured David in Maon but word came to Saul that the Philistines had attacked the land;
3. How the Lord always watches over the righteous and how He confounds the plans of the unrighteous.

HOMILY

-About the character of Christ as foretold Isaiah-

"He shall not cry nor lift up nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break and the smoking flax shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgment unto truth" (Isaiah 42:2-3).

Who had more right than the Lord, the Son of God, to raise His voice at the lawless ones in His vineyard on earth? Who had a greater right to reprimand sinners who scorn God and God's law? O sweet meekness, unseen among men! O pure mountain water which flows down from the heights and silently washes the impurity of the habitations of men! Many pagans think that they would believe in Christ if they could hear from Him, not kind words, but thundering words. But let the pagans say which is better, thunderous words with shouting and roaring which pass without effect as smoke is chased by the wind or kind words which have the effect of thunder? Can a legion of thunders expel a legion of demons from a man possessed? But a legion of thunders struck above Gadara but the legion of demons in the man possessed did not even feel that. Neither did our Lord Jesus shout at the demons but rather quietly told them to come out and they obediently came forth. Brethren, it is not a matter of shouting or criticizing but rather of power.

"A bruised reed shall He not break and the smoking flax shall He not quench." This refers to the Old Testament whose spirit the Pharisees had completely bruised and overloaded with their Sabbatical formalities and which only smoked but did not give any light to men because of their blunted understanding and the stony hearts of men. The Lord will not break the bruised reed neither will He completely quench the almost extinguished fire of that law which He gave. Still, this pertains to sinful men. Men subdued by sin He will not put an end to nor sinners in whom the divine light has turned into smoke will He quench but He will straighten the reed and rekindle the divine fire in men. For because of sinners, He came into the world. He will proclaim judgment softly and gently but with the power which truth itself alone conveys. He will behave gently and humbly and with compassion and with mercy similar to a physician - but far more sublimely and cordially than a physician when He enters a house of a madman.

O gentle and serene Lord, fill us with Your All-wondrous meekness and serenity.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE BARTHOLOMEW

Today commemorates the translation of the relics of St. Bartholomew, although his main feast is celebrated on June 11. When this great apostle was crucified in Albanopolis [Derbend] in Armenia, Christians removed his body and honorably buried it in a lead sarcophagus. When numerous miracles occurred over the grave of the apostle, especially healings of the sick, because of which the number of Christians increased, the pagans then took the sarcophagus containing the relics of Bartholomew and tossed it into the sea. At the same time they also threw four more sarcophagi into the sea containing the relics of four martyrs: Papias, Lucian, Gregory and Acacius. However, by God's providence, the sarcophagi did not sink but were carried by the current and floated: Acacius to the town of Askalon, Gregory to Calabria, Lucian to Messina, Papias to the other side of Sicily and Bartholomew to the island of Lipara. By some mysterious revelation Agathon, the Bishop of Lipara, learned of the approaching relics of the holy Apostle Bartholomew to Lipara. Agathon, with the clergy and people, came to the shore to receive the sarcophagus with great joy. On that occasion, many healings of the sick occurred from the relics of the holy apostle. The relics were placed in the church of St. Bartholomew and there they reposed until the time of Theophilus the Iconoclast about the year 839 A.D. and since the Muslims threatened Lipara, the relics of the apostle were translated to Benevento. Thus, the Lord glorified His apostle by miracles both during his life and after his death.

2. THE APOSTLE TITUS

Titus was one of the Seventy [Apostles]. He was born in Crete and educated in Greek philosophy and poetry. Following a dream, he began reading the Prophet Isaiah and doubted all the wisdom of the Hellenes. Hearing about Christ the Lord, Titus traveled to Jerusalem with other Cretans and personally heard the words of the Savior and witnessed His mighty works. His young heart completely adhered to Christ. Later, he was baptized by the Apostle Paul whom he served as a son to a father in the work of evangelization. Paul loved Titus so much that, at times, he referred to him as son: **"To Titus, my beloved son" (Titus 1:4)** and, at times, brother: **"I urged Titus to go to you and I sent the other brother with him" (2 Corinthians 12:18)**. Titus traveled extensively with the great apostle of the people [St. Paul] and was appointed by him as the bishop of Crete. Titus was present at the suffering and death of Paul in Rome and honorably buried the body of his teacher and spiritual father. After that, Titus returned to Crete where, with great success, he baptized the pagans and prudently governed the Church of God until old age. Titus entered into rest at the age of ninety-four.

3. THE HOLY CONFESSORS OF EDESSA

They suffered much for the Orthodox Faith in prisons and in exile at the time of Emperor Valens who adhered to the Arian heresy. However, they were all freed under Emperor Theodosius.

4. SAINT MENNAS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Mennas wisely governed the Church from 536-552 A.D. Before that, he was in charge of the Home of St. Sampson a home for the indigent and needy. Pope Agapitus, who had come Constantinople at that time for the sake of refuting and deposing the heretical Patriarch Anthimus, participated at the consecration of Menas as bishop.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE TITUS

Only the immature spirit, soothes itself by fables,
For him who seeks the truth, fables do not help.
Titus, the chaste one, on impure Crete was,
Longing for the truth brought him to Christ;
And, when upon the face of Almighty God, he gazed,
All of his fables were as muddied water:
Christ, the truth is: the Cross is the path to truth,
To heavenly heights, the Cross elevates the soul,
Dedicated to the mystery of God's plan,
Titus these labors and countless tortures accepted,
Labors for himself and for the teacher,
For the great Paul, the parent in the spirit.
When, with a sword, the blasphemous Nero beheaded Paul
Because of that, Titus did not lose faith and courage.
But, honorably and peacefully, buried the father,
And to Crete returned to labor twice as much.
The temple of Diana fell, the temple of Zeus vanished,
From Titus' wondrous prayerful power,
The darkness of error dispersed; by Christ, Crete, he enlightened.
Titus, Paul's co-apostle, wonderful and holy.

REFLECTION

The superhuman courage and readiness of our Christian foretellers to endure all sufferings and voluntary death for Christ, evoked fear on their tormentors. Emperor Maximian, a fierce and merciless persecutor of Christians, ordered his pro-consul in Antioch to release St. Andrew Stratelates from prison to freedom out of fear that the people, who respected Andrew more than they did the emperor, would rebel. Emperor Valens ordered his eparch in Edessa to slay all Christians who opposed Arius. The eparch had more human compassion than the emperor and secretly warned the Christians at night not to come out of the city the following day into the field where they usually held services (since the Arians had seized all the churches in the city) so that they would not be killed. The next day, contrary to this warning, all the Christians set out happily to the field, rejoicing that they will suffer and die for the True Faith. The eparch, going with the soldiers from the city, saw a Christian woman with a child in her arms as she hurried past the soldiers toward the field. The eparch said to her: "Have you not heard that the eparch, with his soldiers, will come and kill all that he finds there?" The woman answered: "I heard and, because of that, I am hurrying that I may die for Christ with the others." The eparch further asked: "And why are you taking this child with you?" The woman replied: "I also want my child to become worthy of martyrdom together with me." Hearing and seeing this, the eparch became frightened and returned and informed the emperor. The emperor became greatly frightened and revoked his order concerning the massacre.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the unusual generosity of David (**1 Samuel 24 - 1 Kings 24**):

1. How Saul, pursuing David, entered without knowledge into the cave where David was hiding with the young men;
2. How the young men pressured David to kill Saul but David refused;
3. How David cried out to Saul: **"The Lord judge between me and you" (1 Samuel 24:12 - 1 Kings 24:12).**

HOMILY

-About the opened prison and the lighted darkness-

**"That you may say to the prisoners, Go forth;
to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves"
(Isaiah 49:9).**

Who is the greater prisoner than he who is bound by sin? Is there a greater darkness than the darkness of sin, death and hell? Who can loose from sin? "God alone". Even the Scribes and Pharisees themselves acknowledged this. **"Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (St. Mark 2:7).** Christ released many from sin, and made them free and whole. Therefore, if "God alone" is able to release prisoners from sins, then why did not the Jews acknowledge Him as God? The reason being is that they were bound by sin and were unable logically to reflect to the end, nor yet did they allow the Lord to release them from the bonds of sins. Look and see into what kind of stupidity the wise men of the Jews fall: while on the one hand, they confirm that "God alone" is able to loose man from sin while, on the other hand, they accuse Christ that He works with the help of the devil! The devil is the one who binds, so how can the devil lose? The devil is the one who destroys man, how then will he save him? Where there are devils, there also is prison: sin, death and hell. "Christ alone" had the power, the divine, unequaled power to lead and to save the souls of men out from prison. **"My son, your sins are forgiven you!" (St. Mark 2:5). "Young man arise!" (St. Luke 7:14) "Lazarus, come forth!" (St. John 11:43).** By His mighty word He removed the bonds of the sinners and led the dead into the light of life. By His descent into Hell, he destroyed the throne of Satan and freed the souls of the righteous ones. By His resurrection, He fully and completely revealed His irresistible authority over all the diabolical bonds of the devil, over all the intrigues of hell and over the "last enemy death": **"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26).**

O Lord, Victor over demons, Liberator from sin, Raiser of the dead, You do we worship and to You do we pray: free us, resurrect us and bless us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR ADRIAN AND NATALIA

Adrian and Natalia were husband and wife, both of noble and wealthy families from Nicomedia. Adrian was the head of the Praetorium and a pagan and Natalia was secretly a Christian. Both were young and lived together in marriage for only thirteen months until martyrdom. When the nefarious Emperor Maximian visited Nicomedia, he ordered that Christians be seized and subjected to torture. In a cave near the city, twenty-three Christians were hidden. Someone reported them to the authorities and they were cruelly flogged with oxen whips and rods and then cast into prison. After that they were taken out of prison and brought before the Praetor to register their names. Adrian observed these people, tortured but patient, serene and meek and he made them swear to tell him what they expect from their God for so many tortures endured? They spoke to him concerning the blessedness of the righteous in the Kingdom of God. Hearing this and, again observing these people, Adrian, at once, turned to the scribe and said to him: "Write down my name with these saints, I also am a Christian." When the emperor learned of this, he asked Adrian: "Have you gone out of your mind?" To that Adrian replied: "I have not gone out of my mind but rather I came to my senses." Learning of this, Natalia greatly rejoiced and when Adrian, with the others, sat chained in prison, she came and administered to all of them. When they flogged and tortured her husband with various tortures, Natalia encouraged him to endure to the end. After lengthy tortures and imprisonment, the emperor ordered that an anvil be brought to prison and their legs and hands be broken with a hammer. This was carried out and Adrian, with twenty-three honorably men, gave up the spirit under the greatest of tortures. Natalia took their relics to Constantinople and honorably buried them there. After a few days, Adrian appeared to her all in light and beauty and called her, that, she also come to God and she peacefully gave up her spirit to God.

2. THE VENERABLE TITHOES

Tithoes was a disciple of St. Pachomius and great among the ascetics of Egypt. Tithoes was abbot of a monastery in Tabennsi. He lived his entire life in absolute purity. At one time a brother asked him: "What path leads to humility?" To this Tithoes replied: "The path to humility is abstinence, prayer and considering yourself lower than anything." Tithoes attained a very high degree of perfection and whenever he lifted up his hands in prayer, his spirit entered into ecstasy. He died in the Lord in the fourth or fifth century. The Venerable Ibsion is commemorated together with him.

3. SAINT ZER-JABOB

Jacob was a great Christian missionary in Abyssinia [Ethiopia].

4. THE MIRACLE OF THE MOST-HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD IN MOSCOW IN THE YEAR 1395 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR ADRIAN AND HIS WIFE, SAINT NATALIA, AND THE TWENTY THREE MARTYRS

The path is thorny, in Paradise are roses,
Bitter sufferings, but Christ is sweet.
What is heard in the darkened dungeon?
Against the hard anvil, the hammer strikes,
But, not iron nor lead, does it forge,
But breaks the legs of the martyrs,
And breaks the arms of the martyrs,
Martyrs, the soldiers of Christ.
One hand white, noble
Stained with blood, to the dust falls
That is the hand of Saint Adrian,
Saint Natalia took the hand
And with the hand, from the dungeon runs
Washes the hand and, in silk, wraps it,
Kiss the hand and mists with tears.
Wherever she walks, with her, the hand she carries,
While she sleeps, beneath her head, she places it,
To the severed hand, quietly she speaks:
"Holy hand of my Adrian,
You have helped me much,
Once again, help me, O hand,
To heaven, raise me as soon as possible
Where Adrian lives with the saints,
It was but a short while and did not last long
Adrian, to Natalia appeared,
Than all the emperors, beautiful and more radiant was he,
And, with a heavenly voice, invited her:
Come to me, sister Natalia,
Come to me, be eternally alive,
Into the Kingdom, the eternal King invites you.

REFLECTION

Occasionally one hears an ungodly word even among Christians: here, even God cannot help! There is no danger in which God cannot help nor are there any enemies who could conquer by their own power without God's permission. Do not ask how God will destroy the powerful army of our enemies that is easier for God than it is for you to inhale or exhale air. Read how God, by one apparition, terrified the Syrian army, so the army dispersed and Israel was saved: **"For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel has hired against us the king of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us"** (2 Kings 7:6).

Read how Jerusalem was saved from the powerful army of Babylon without any effort of King Hezekiah except his cry and prayer before God: **"And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred four-score and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses"** (2 Kings 19:35). But God did not perform such miracles only in ancient times but He performs them every time when the faithful pray to Him. Thus, in the year 1395 A.D., the Tartar King Tamburlaine [Tamerlane] surrounded Moscow with his countless soldiers. The Russians brought the miracle-working icon of the Most-holy Theotokos from the town of Vladimir to Moscow and all the people with tears began to pray to the Most-holy Pure One. Suddenly, for no visible reason, the army of Tartars began to withdraw hurriedly and to flee. What happened? Tamburlaine had a vision in a dream: clouds of saints moving beneath the heavens and in their midst, the Holy Birth-giver of God as Queen and, further still, countless hosts of angels. The Theotokos sharply threatened Tamburlaine and ordered him to leave immediately from the land of the Russians and the saints waved their staffs at the emperor. Terrified by this dream, Tamburlaine as soon as it dawned, ordered a retreat and flight.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the generosity of David (**1 Samuel 26 - 1 Kings 26**):

1. How David entered the camp of Saul at night and, while Saul was sleeping, took his spear and cup[cruse of water];
2. How David's commander [Abishai] wanted to pierce Saul but David forbade it;
3. How David left vengeance to God.

HOMILY

-About the sufferings [passions] of Christ, how Isaiah foresaw them-

"I gave my back to the smiters and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6).

Brethren, this is the prophecy and now hear the exact fulfillment of that prophecy: **"And when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified"** (St. Matthew 27:26). Is not this what the prophet foretold: "I gave My back to the smiters"? Listen further: **"One of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand"** (St. John 18:22). And again: **"They struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, 'Prophecy, who is it that smote You?' "** (St. Luke 22:64). Is not this what the prophet foretold? **"I gave My cheeks to them that smite " ? Listen even further: "...And they mocked Him"** (St. Matthew 27-29), **"And they smote Him on the head with a reed and did spit upon Him"** (St. Mark 15:19); is not this what the prophet foretold: **"I hid not My face from shame and spitting."** Observe, brethren, how clear is the prophecy, clear from word to word. Observe with horror, how the discerning man of God sees more clearly through the walls of several hundred years than the ordinary eye, which sees the bottom of clear and shallow water! That God, by His irresistible power, opens the spirit of mortal man to see, by the spirit, the events in the distance as clearly as the physical eyes see the events close by. How then does the All-seeing God Himself, see through the marrow of our bones, through the fog of our thoughts, and through all the secrets of our hearts? Because He is present at our thoughts even before they are born and present at our desires before they are conceived. He is the one undeceived and undeceivable witness of all events, external and internal, in the heights and in the depths, in the width and in the length. And He witnesses to our spirit truthfully, that which our soul desires to know for the sake of our good benefit and for the salvation of our soul.

O, All-seeing and All-wonderful Witness to all the secrets in heaven and on earth, the Creator and our Good Provider, You alone see the weakness of all of us. Help us, O help us, to learn that which is necessary for the sake of our eternal salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE PIMEN [POEMEN] THE GREAT

Pimen was an Egyptian by birth and a great ascetic of Egypt. As a boy, he visited the most renowned spiritual men and, from them, gathered tangible knowledge as a bee gathers honey from flowers. Pimen once begged the elder Paul to take him to St. Paisius. Seeing Pimen, Paisius said to Paul: "This child will save many; the hand of God is with him." In time, Pimen was tonsured a monk and attracted two of his brothers to the monastic life as well. Once his mother came to see her sons but Pimen did not permit her to enter but through the door asked her: "Do you desire more to see us here or there in eternity?" The mother withdrew with joy saying: "Since I will surely see you there, then I do not desire to see you here." In the monastery of these three brothers, governed by Abba Anubis, Pimen's eldest brother, this was their Rule [Typikon]: at night, they spent four hours of working with their hands, four hours of sleep and four hours of reading the Psalter. During the day, from morning until noon, they spent in alternating work and prayer; from noon until Vespers they spent reading and, in the afternoon, they prepared supper for themselves the only meal in twenty-four hours and that usually consisted of some vegetables. Concerning their life, Pimen himself speaks: "We ate that which was given to us. No one ever said: 'Give me something else or I do not want that.' In this manner, we spent our entire life in silence and peace." Pimen lived a life of mortification as an ascetic in the fifth century and died peacefully at an old age.

2. VENERABLE PIMEN [POEMEN] OF PALESTINE

Pimen lived a life of asceticism in Rouba, in the wilderness of Palestine during the time of Emperor Maurice (582-602 A.D.). In his youth, he was a shepherd. Once his dogs attacked a man and tore him to pieces and he, out of mischievousness, did not defend the man. As a result of that, it was revealed to him that he, in the end, would die from wild beasts. And thus it happened. He was devoured by wild beasts and gave up his soul to his Lord.

3. SAINT HOSIUS BISHOP OF CORDOVA

As the Bishop of Cordova, Hosius governed the Church in Spain for over sixty years. He prominently participated at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea [325 A.D.] and presided at the local Council in Sardica in 347 A.D. So zealous was he for Orthodoxy that, before his death, he again issued an anathema against the Arian heresy.

4. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR KUKSHA AND PIMEN [POEMEN] THE FASTER

Kuksha and Pimen were both monks in the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev. Kuksha, with success, preached the Gospel to the Wallachians and baptized them. One day, pagans attacked him and slew him along with his disciple. At that moment, Pimen the Faster was standing during the church service in the Monastery of the Caves and, seeing in the spirit the death of Kuksha his disciple and companion, cried out: "Today, our brother Kuksha was slain for the Holy Gospel." Saying this, he himself gave up the spirit in the year 1113 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE PIMEN [POEMEN] THE GREAT OF PALESTINE

Venerable Pimen, depth of wisdom,
And a great torch of Christ's light,
From the time when he put the world of vanity behind him
No one does he reprimand, no one does he reproach
Once, before Pimen, the brethren quarreled
But Pimen remained silent. Some reprimanded him:
How do you listen to the quarreling and, to you, everything is the same?
Pimen replied: I have died a long time ago. -
How can I be saved someone asked of him
That my mind, after devilish slander, does not wander?
Upon boiling water, flies do not land -
And, from a warm soul, the devils flee. -
Someone else said: What is more certain:
The speech of your brethren or silence?
By one and the other, God is glorified,
For the sake of the glory of God choose one for yourself.
How can one defend himself from evil?
Evil does not permit itself to be defeated by evil
To one who is evil, strive to do something good,
That will inflame even his heart.
One does not build his home by destroying someone else's home.
There, the third one benefits, and the third one is the devil.
Two wicked passions, poison our souls,
Freedom we do not have while they suffocate us:
Pleasures of the flesh and worldly vanity,
Free from them is only the holy soul.

REFLECTION

One who crawls up a steep mountain and scrapes with both hands and feet to take one step forward, not thinking to look back, such were the great Orthodox ascetics in the difficult climb to the Kingdom of God. Their labor and their detachment is indeed for amazement. St. Pimen did not want to see his mother when she came to visit him. A prince wanted to see Pimen but he refused. Then the prince thought of a cunning way, to force the elder to meet with him; he arrested the son of Pimen's sister and said to her that he would release her son only if Pimen himself comes to speak with him. The sister went into the wilderness and, knocking at the door, begged her brother to come out and save her son. But Pimen did not come out. Then sister began to scold and curse him. Hearing of this, the prince ordered that a letter be written to Pimen saying that if he, Pimen, would at least put in writing, (since he did not do so orally) implore the prince to release his nephew, the prince would do so. Pimen replied: "O mighty prince, command to probe well the guilt of the young man and if the guilt is such that he deserves death, let him die, so that by temporal punishment, he will escape the torments in eternity but if the guilt does not merit the penalty of death then castigate him according to the law and then release him." Reading this just and impartial judgment, the prince was greatly astonished, released the youth and his respect for Pimen increased two-fold.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate Saul's total apostasy from the one God (**1 Samuel 28-31 - 1 Kings 28-31**):

1. How he [Saul] frightened by the Philistines, turned to a pagan sorceress [the witch of Endor] to prognosticate for him;
2. How the sorceress, through prognostication, evoked a spirit who called himself Samuel and who prophesied Saul's death;
3. How Saul with his sons perished at the hands of the Philistines.

HOMILY

-About the Day of Christ and how Isaiah prophesied it-

"Therefore My people shall know in that day that I am He that does speak: behold, it is I" (Isaiah 52:6).

Brethren, our God is the God of Truth. Even on the sun there are spots of darkness but on our God, there is not a spot of untruth. Every word spoken by God through the prophets came true. When the Word [Logos] of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ our Lord, then all the prophecies which referred to Him and which, for the Jews until then were dark enigmas, were revealed as clear as the sun. In the Holy Gospel it is said: **"And the Word was made flesh" (St. John 1:14)**, the Pre-eternal word of God, the eternal Wisdom of God and the Son of God, the Word of God made flesh, every word of prophesy is revealed in bodily form. Until the Lord Christ came in the flesh to visit mankind, the scribes and readers of Holy Scripture could think of many words of the prophets, long and long unfulfilled, that those are only the words of the prophets as men and not words from God. But God did not permit anyone to think lowly of His prophets, that is why He said that men shall know "...in that day that I am He that does speak". Therefore, God wanted to give importance to every word of the prophets and wanted to teach men patience, to patiently await "that day", that wondrous day when the manifestation of the Lord on earth in the flesh will clearly cry out in every ear: "Behold, it is I!" He who recognized the Lord Jesus as God in the flesh, that one recognized in Him, simultaneously, that one Who spoke through the prophets.

"Behold, it is I!" thus speaks Christ today. **"I am He"** Who speaks through all the created universe. **"I am He"** Who spoke through the prophets. **"I am He"** Who, through the lips of the body spoke the words of eternal salvation. **"I am He"** Who spoke through the apostles, saints and teachers. **"I am He"** Who speaks and Who will continue to speak through My Holy Church until the end of time. **"I am He"** Who speaks and **"I am He"** about Whom it is spoken.

O Lord, to You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. VENERABLE MOSES THE BLACK [THE ROBBER]

Moses was an Ethiopian by birth and by profession, at first, a robber and leader of a band of robbers and, after that, a penitent and great ascetic. As the slave of a master, Moses escaped and joined the robbers. Because of his great physical strength and arrogance, the robbers chose him as their leader. Suddenly, Moses was overcome with pangs of conscience and repentance for the misdeeds, which he had committed. He left the group, entered a monastery and gave himself completely in obedience to his spiritual father and to the monastic rule. He benefited much from the teachings of Saints Macarius, Arsenius and Isidore. Later, he withdrew to solitude in a cell where he dedicated himself completely to physical labor, prayer, vigils and godly-thoughts. Tormented by the demon of fornication, Moses confessed to Isidore, his spiritual father, and from him, received counsel to fast even more and never to eat to full satisfaction. When even this did not help he, at the counsel of the elder, began to keep vigil at night and to pray standing; after that, he began the practice of bringing water to the elderly monks from a distant well all night long. After six years of terrible struggles, St. Isidore finally miraculously healed him of fornicating thoughts, fantasies and dreams brought about on him by demons. Moses was ordained a priest in old age. He founded his own monastery and had seventy-five disciples and lived in this life for seventy-five years. He foresaw his death and, one day, he told his disciples to flee for the barbarians were going to attack the monastery. When the disciples also urged him to flee with them, Moses said that he must die by violence for, at one time, he himself committed violence and, according to the words: **"For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (St. Matthew 26:52)**. He remained there with six brethren and the barbarians came and slew them. One of the brethren, hidden in the vicinity, beheld and saw seven shining wreaths as they descended upon the seven martyrs.

2. THE VENERABLE SAVA OF PSKOV AND KRYPETSK

Sava was a Serb by descent. He lived a life of asceticism, at first, in the monastery of the Holy Birth-giver of God in Pskov and then was abbot of that monastery. But they praised him and he fled from the glory of men and withdrew to the shores of Lake Krypetsk where he founded a new community dedicated to St. John the Theologian. Nevertheless, even here, he was unable to conceal his fame and prominence. He was visited by Prince Yaroslav of Pskov and his wife. Sava would not allow his wife to enter the monastery but rather blessed her and prayed to God for her outside the monastery and healed her of a certain disease. This saint of God found rest in the year 1495 A.D. and his relics were and remained miracle-working. Among his visitors to Krypetsk, the Abbot Dositheus is mentioned.

3. THE ASSEMBLY OF ALL THE CHOSEN MEN OF GOD OF THE MONASTERY OF THE CAVES IN KIEV

HYMN OF PRAISE

VENERABLE MOSES THE BLACK [THE ROBBER]

Blessed is he upon whom God shows mercy!
The mercy of God is joy,
In both worlds joy.
Moses Murin [the Black] as a prodigal son
Repented and to God returned,
By much weeping, many sins repaid
By much fasting, himself withered,
Black in the face, shining in the soul.
By many all-night vigils, passions he tamed,
Of demons authority, freed himself.
While his soul, as a lake became
Atop the mountains that, into the heavens gaze.
In which heaven mirrors its face.
When once, they asked Moses
"Do not the sins of others sadden you?"
"Sinful men, do they not concern you?"
Saint Moses tearfully replied:
"Whoever has a corpse in the house
That one does not weep over someone else's corpse
Rather weeps over his own corpse."
The lion, into a lamb, often changes,
Such a miracle, only Christ performs.
Moses, a lion in the mountain was
And, a gentle lamb became.
By his holy prayers, let
God grant salvation to us also.

REFLECTION

A true Christian avoids the praise of men; not only avoids, but has a true fear of it. St. Sava of Pskov left the office of abbot, the monastery and the good brotherhood of the monastery and fled to a desolate place to escape the praise of men, for praise of men robs our heart. A devout prince, upon hearing of the mortification of St. Moses Murin [the Black], went with his retinue into the desert to see him. Informing Moses that the prince was coming to his monastery, Moses quickly ran out and began to flee and to hide somewhere, but he unexpectedly encountered the high-ranking visitors. "Where is the cell of Abba Moses?" the servants of the prince asked not suspecting that this was Moses himself. Moses opened his mouth and said: "What do you want him for? He is an ignorant old man, very untruthful and completely impure in life." Hearing this, the visitors were astonished and continued on. When they arrived at the cell of Moses, they inquired about the elder and the monks said that he was not there. Then they began to relate what a monk on the road had said about Moses. The monks were saddened and asked them: "How did he look, this old man, who spoke to you mocking words about this holy man?" and when they said that he was very dark in the face, tall and in a miserable garment; the monks cried out loudly: "but that was indeed the Abba Moses!" By this incident, the prince benefited greatly spiritually and rejoicedly returned to his home.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the nobility of David (**2 Samuel 1 - 2 Kings 1**):

1. How a messenger arrived and informed David about the death of Saul and Jonathan thinking to receive a reward for that;
2. How David bitterly mourned and lamented for Saul who wished him [David] nothing but death.

HOMILY

-About the forms of the Messiah-

"And we saw that He had no form nor comeliness" (Isaiah 53:2).

This, the prophet speaks about Christ the Lord as a man: "He had no form nor comeliness!" How is it that He Who gave form to every created thing and who created the beautiful angels of heaven and all the beauty of the universe, that He did not have form and comeliness [beauty]? Brethren, this need not confuse you. He was able to appear in the manner in which He willed. But he did not want to appear in angelic beauty as He did not want to appear in royal power and in the luxury of the wealthy. He who enters a house of sorrow does not dress in the most beautiful clothes, neither does a doctor dress in his best clothes when he visits the gravely ill. But the Lord entered a house of sorrow and into a hospital. The body is the garment of the soul. He dressed in a simple garment to impress us, not by His dress but rather by the power of the spirit. We do not know exactly what His appearance was. According to tradition, His face was swarthy and His hair was of a chestnut color. When King Abgar sent Ananias his artist to paint the face of the Lord, he was not able to draw even a line on the cloth for, it is said that, Christ's face shown with an unusual light.

After all, even if Christ had clothed Himself in the most beautiful body, such a body as only He is able to fashion, what would that physical beauty of His be in comparison to the immortal beauty of His Divinity? The greatest earthly beauty is merely only a shadow of the heavenly beauty. The Prophet Daniel was a young and handsome man but when an angel of God stood before him, he himself said: **"...there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness turned in me into corruption" (Daniel 10:8).** What is the face of man from earth in comparison to the likeness of an immortal angel of God? As darkness in comparison to the light! Of course, even the prophet looking at Christ the Immortal King in the flesh of man and comparing His earthly likeness with His Immortal likeness, had to cry out: "He had no form nor comeliness."

O Gentle and All-gentle Lord, Who for our sake was clothed in our miserable physical garment to serve us and not to frighten us, to You be glory and thanks, to You be glory and thanks.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

AUGUST - 29 -

1. THE BEHEADING OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST [ST. MATTHEW 14:1-12]

Herod Antipas, son of the elder Herod, who was the slayer of the children of Bethlehem at the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus, was ruler of Galilee at the time when John the Baptist was preaching. This Herod was married to the daughter of Aretas, an Arabian prince. But Herod, an evil sprout of an evil root, put away his lawful wife and unlawfully took unto himself Herodias as his concubine, the wife of his brother Philip, who was still living. John the Baptist stood up against this lawlessness and strongly denounced Herod who then cast John into prison. At the time of a banquet in his court in Sebastia in Galilee Salome, the daughter of Herodias and Philip, danced before the guests. The drunken Herod was so taken by this dance that he promised Salome that he would give her whatever she asked of him, even though it be half of his kingdom. Being persuaded by her mother, Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist. Herod gave the order and John was beheaded in prison and his head brought to him on a platter. John's disciples took the body of their teacher by night and honorably buried it and Herodias pierced the tongue of John with a needle in many places and buried the head in an unclean place. What later happened to John the Baptist's head can be read on February 24. However, God's punishment quickly befell this group of evil doers. Prince Aretas, in order to cleanse his daughter's honor, attacked Herod with his army and defeated him. The defeated Herod was sentenced by the Roman Caesar, Caligula, to exile at first to Gaul and later to Spain. As exiles, Herod and Herodias lived in poverty and humiliation until the earth opened up and swallowed them. Salome died an evil death on the Sikaris (Sula) river. The death of St. John occurred before the Pascha [Passover] but its celebration on August 29 was established because, on that day, a church which had been built over his grave in Sebastia by Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena was consecrated. In this church the relics of John's disciples, Eliseus and Audius, were also placed.

2. VENERABLE THEODORA OF THESSALONICA

As the wife of a wealthy and devout man, they lived on the island of Aegina. But when the Arabs menaced Aegina, they settled in Thessalonica. There they gave up their one and only daughter to a convent who, in monasticism, received the name of Theopista. Soon after, Theodora's husband died and she also became a nun. She was a great ascetic. She often heard angelic singing and often spoke to the sisters: "Do you not hear how beautifully the angels sing in the heavenly sanctuary?" She died at the age of seventy-five in the year 879 A.D. From her relics flowed healing myrrh by which many were healed.

3. THE HOLY FEMALE MARTYR VASILISSA

Vasilissa suffered for Christ in Srem [Serbia].

4. THE HOLY MARTYR ANASTASIUS

Anastasius was a young man from Radoviste, the Diocese of Strumica. He learned a trade in Thessalonica. The Turks tried to force him to become a Muslim, which he adamantly rejected and for this he was tortured and finally hanged on August 29, 1794 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

O Saint John, wonderful Baptizer,
Of the Savior, you were the glorious Forerunner,
You, with your purity, touched human souls
And, as an awesome trumpet, from the Jordan resounded
From sleep and idle vices, awakening men,
When the axe was near to the root.
To you I bow, to you I pray:
Every temptation, help me to resist.
Prophet most powerful, to you I bow,
And before you kneel and before you I weep:
From your heart, grant me the strength of a lion,
From your spirit, grant me angelic whiteness.
Grant me your strength that by practice to attain
To God be submissive and to rule over myself,
To baptize by fasting, to purify by all-night vigils,
To sweeten by prayer and heavenly vision,
And to every martyrdom, walk without fear
With your courage and with a strong faith.
O Saint John, God's chosen one,
And glorious martyr for supreme justice,
You, of whom the godless armies are afraid
To my prayers, do not turn a deaf ear,
But, strengthen me by your prayers,
That as a true candle before the Lord, I stand.

REFLECTION

If you observe how men die, you would see that the death of a man usually resembles his sin. As it is written: **"For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (St. Matthew 26:52)**. Every sin is a knife and men usually are slain by that sin which they most readily committed. An example of this is given to us by Salome, the foul daughter of Herodias who asked for and received from Herod the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Living in Spain in the town of Lerida [Loredo] with the exiled Herod and Herodias, Salome set out one day across the frozen river Sikaris. The ice broke and she fell into the water up to her neck. Icebergs squeezed around her neck and she wiggled, dancing with her feet in the water as she once danced at the court of Herod. However, she was unable either to raise herself up or to drown until a sharp piece of ice severed her head. The water carried her body away and her head was brought to Herodias on a platter as was the head of John the Baptist at one time. Behold how terrible a death resembles the sin committed.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the righteousness of David (**2 Samuel 3 - 2 Kings 3**):

1. How Abner the commander, an opponent of David, gave himself over to David trusting him;
2. How Joab, David's commander, slew Abner;
3. How David cursed the house of Joab and wept much for Abner.

HOMILY

-About the healing of mankind by the wounds of Christ-

"And by His stripes [wounds] we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

We are healed by the wounds of Christ. Thus, the prophet of God prophesies and we now know that his prophecy is true. By the suffering of Christ, we have been saved from eternal suffering; by His All-pure blood, we are cleansed of the leprosy of sin and are enlivened. Our blood and body became impure from sinful passions; but our spirit, the nest and source of bodily impurity, first became impure. Can the unclean be cleansed by the unclean? Can a dirty linen be washed with dirty water? It cannot.

Only that which is clean can wash that which is unclean. Even the pagans feel that mankind is impure. But, they [the pagans] want to cleanse the impure by the impure first, by invoking impure spirits and worshipping them. And second, by offering impure sacrifices, be they human or animal sacrifices. One drop of the blood of the All-pure Christ can cleanse mankind more than all of the idolatrous sacrifices from the beginning of the world. Why? Because the blood of Christ is pure and all else is impure. Physicians take one drop of a strong remedy and diluting it, vaccinate many people with it in order to protect them from disease. We even dilute the blood of Christ in the Chalice [Cup] with water and then we take it and drink it, for it is said that when they pierced the body of the Lord with a spear **"there came out blood and water" (St. John 19:34)**. Such is the power from one drop of His blood that, the world could be burned by it. That is the sinless blood, the only sinless blood; the blood most-pure, the only pure blood in the world.

O, if men would only know what is the power of absolute purity! All the impure ones from sin would rush to cleanse themselves by the All-pure Christ and all the helpless ones would rush to partake of the Blood and Body of Christ [Holy Communion]; and all the unbelieving would believe in Christ. For there is three and all three are pure and all three purify: pure spirit, pure blood and pure body, and only the pure can purify the impure; and that which is healthy can heal the unhealthy; and that which is powerful can raise the helpless.

O Lord, our omnipotent Lord, cleanse us sinners by Your bloody wound, by Your innocent and all-pure wound.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE ASSEMBLY OF THE HOLY SERBIAN ENLIGHTENERS AND TEACHERS

On this day are commemorated, not all the Serbian saints in general, but rather only a few archbishops and patriarchs: Saint Sava, the first Archbishop of the Serbs called "Equal to the Apostles"; Arsenius, the successor to St. Sava, a great hierarch and miracle worker; Saint Sava II, son of the First-crowned, King Stephen who lived in Jerusalem for a long time and is called: "similar to Moses in meekness" [refer to the Srbljak, the Service Book of the Serbian Saints]; Nicodemus, who lived a life of asceticism on the Holy Mountain [Athos] and was abbot of Hilendar and following that was Archbishop "of all the Serbian and Coastal lands"; Joannicius, at first an archbishop and then patriarch from 1346 A.D. and died in 1349 A.D.; Ephrem, an ascetic who was elected patriarch against his will at the time of Prince Lazar in 1376 A.D. and crowned Lazar. After that he resigned the patriarchal throne and retreated into solitude; Spiridon, the successor to Ephrem and who died in the year 1388 A.D.; Macarius, who renovated many ancient monasteries [Zaduzbine], printed many ecclesiastical books in Skadar, Venice, Belgrade and other places. He built the famous refectory in the monastery at Pec and labored much to advance the Church with the assistance of his brother Mehmed Sokolovich, the Grand Vezir. Macarius died in the year 1574 A.D; Gabriel, by birth a nobleman of the Rajich family. He participated in the Moscow [church] council under Patriarch Nikon for which he was tortured by the Turks for treason and hanged in the year 1656 A.D. Along with these are also mentioned; Eustace, Jacob, Daniel, Gregory, John, Sava III, Gregory, John, Maksim and Nikon. Many of them lived a life of asceticism on the Holy Mountain [Athos] and all were "meek and faithful servants in the vineyard of the Lord."

2. SAINTS ALEXANDER, JOHN AND PAUL, PATRIARCHS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Alexander participated in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea [325 A.D.] in place of the aged Patriarch Metrophanes. Afterward, he succeeded Metrophanes. When certain philosophers wanted to debate with him concerning faith, he said to one of them: "In the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to be silent!" and the philosopher became mute that very moment. By his prayer, he even shortened the life of Arius. Alexander died at age ninety-eight in the year 340 A.D. St. John the Faster governed the Church during the reign of the wicked Emperor Anastasius the Acephalite heretic. He died in the year 595 A.D. St. Paul IV governed the Church for five years and eight months and then resigned the throne and secretly received the Angelic Habit in order to repent for his sins because he had earlier agreed with the iconoclasts. He was the predecessor of the great Tarasius and died at the time of Irene and Constantine in the year 784 A.D.

3. THE VENERABLE CHRISTOPHER

Christopher was an ascetic of the sixth century in the community of St. Theodosius. In a vision he saw the votive lamps of the diligent monks burning and the votive lamps of the slothful monks not burning.

4. SAINT EULALIUS, BISHOP OF CAESAREA IN CAPPADOCIA

Eulalius was one of the predecessors of St. Basil. He defrocked his son of his priestly rank for wearing clothing unbecoming his spiritual vows.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE HOLY SERBIAN ENLIGHTENERS AND TEACHERS

Chosen ones of God, Serbian saints,
Teachers wise and enlighteners,
Princes spiritual, glorious heroes.
Of the flock of Christ, most good shepherds,
God you served, denied themselves
And beacons you were to your people:
Of divine characteristics, God-bearing men,
From the Holy Trinity, the light you received,
Generously you received and everywhere dispersed it,
And from your labors, miracles sprouted.
In the footprints of Sava, all walked straight
Throughout the Serbian land, holiness you raised,
Faith in the Word of God, you confirmed,
In the new garment, you clothed the souls,
With beautiful churches, you adorned the land,
O men of God, "equal to the angels!"
Of the Serbian people, you were angels,
To glorify God, you taught the Serbs,
To worship the Savior, the living Christ,
And faithfully served the Holy Gospel.
In heaven, that is why the Lord glorified you
And, as candles before the Serbian people, placed you
That living in heaven you shine on earth
To lead your people to truth and justice.
As long as the Serbian people, your example admire
By your prayers until then, the people will live.

REFLECTION

With clamor and disgrace the noisy heretics died. And their deaths alone show God's wrath upon them because of the lies that they spread and the disturbances that they caused the Church of God. Arius, after he was condemned in Nicaea, came to Emperor Constantine one day and begged him to be received into the Church again. The emperor asked Arius if he believes in the Nicæan Symbol of Faith [the Creed] and he, the cunning one, kept a paper in his bosom with his heretically evil confession of faith and striking himself with his hand across his bosom said to the emperor: " Thus, I believe." The emperor thought that Arius had repented and sent him to Patriarch Alexander to receive him into the Church. Under no circumstances was Alexander willing to receive Arius knowing that he lies. However, the emperor designated one day, a Sunday, that Arius had to be received in the Great Church [Hagia Sophia]. On the eve of that day, the holy patriarch prayed to God to receive his soul before the God-mocking heretic is received into the Church. When the Sunday of the appointed day dawned, the patriarch was at service in the church and Arius, with the emperor's men and his "like-minded ones" set out for the church. When they arrived at the Square of Constantine, suddenly a pain, both in body and soul overcame Arius and he looked at a place for bodily need. There on the square was such a public place and he went there. His escort waited a long time and became impatient from waiting. When some of them went to see what was the matter with Arius, they found him dead in that foul place with his entire intestine spilled on the outside in uncleanness and in blood.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the victories of David over the Philistines (**2 Samuel 5 - 2 Kings 5**):

1. How the Philistines attacked the lands of David and David prayed to God and set out and defeated the Philistines;
2. How the Philistines again attacked and David again prayed to God and defeated the Philistines.

HOMILY

-About the mysterious ancestry [generation] of Christ-

"...And who shall declare His generation?" (Isaiah 53:8).

As a hidden source of a great river, thus for the Jews the ancestry of the Lord Jesus was hidden. They read and knew that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, and He was born in Bethlehem but they did not recognize Him. They knew that the Messiah will come from the lineage of David and He was born of the lineage of David through His Most-holy Mother, but they did not recognize or acknowledge Him. They read that He will be born of a Virgin, that He will flee to Egypt and that He will be called out of Egypt and that His forerunner will appear before Him, **"Crying in the wilderness" (St. Mark 1:3)**, and that He will shine as a great light in the darkness and in the shadow of the deadly land of Zebulon and Naphthali and all the rest that the prophets foretold and wrote as a sign of His coming. Still, they did not recognize or acknowledge Him, but rather they crucified the King of Glory as a criminal.

If He were an ordinary man, would the prophet inquire about His ancestry and origin? Whose ancestry and origin in the history of the people of Israel is not known? His ancestry is hidden as the ancestry of Melchisedek. It was hidden for the Jews and is always hidden for unbelievers but for us believers it is not hidden anymore. We know that He is "Light of Light, True God of True God, Begotten not made" (The Nicæan Creed). That is He in eternity. We know that "He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary" [The Nicæan Creed] and that He appeared in the world as man, as God-man. That is He, in time; wondrous, mysterious, glorious and majestic is His ancestry. When we say everything what was revealed to us about Him, nevertheless, we can still ask ourselves: "Who shall declare His generation [ancestry]?" Not because His ancestry is unknown but rather because His ancestry is unreachable, incomprehensible, beyond sensual and above nature.

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, enlighten us by Your divine mind and raise us up to You by Your man-loving power.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE FEAST OF THE GIRDLE OF THE HOLY BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD

After her Dormition [Falling-asleep], the Holy Theotokos gave her girdle [sash] to the Apostle Thomas. That girdle was later brought to Constantinople and kept in a sealed reliquary in the church of the Mother of God at Blachernae, the royal foundation [Zaduzbina] of Empress Pulcheria. This reliquary was never opened until the time of Emperor Leo the Wise (886-912 A.D.). Leo's wife, the Empress Zoe, became mentally ill and, according to a mysterious vision, she desired that the girdle of the Holy Theotokos be placed on her. The emperor implored the patriarch and the reliquary was opened and the girdle was removed and placed on the ailing empress. The empress was immediately healed. This feast was instituted in commemoration of this miracle. One part of the girdle is to be found in Zugdid, Georgia. That is to say: the daughter of Emperor Romanus was healed with the aid of this girdle and later when her father married her to the Georgian Emperor Abuchaz, she took a part of that girdle with her. By order of the Russian Emperor Alexander I, a special church was built in Mingrelia in Zugdid where that part of the miracle-working garment of the Holy Theotokos is kept.

2. SAINT GENNADIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Gennadius succeeded St. Anatolius as patriarch. He was a contemporary of St. Marcian (January 10) and St. Daniel the Stylite (December 11). During his time, the glorious Studite monastery was founded and named after the Roman Senator Studius, who came to Constantinople and with the blessing of Gennadius built the church of St. John the Forerunner and along side, it the monastery. Gennadius was very gentle and restrained. He would not ordain anyone who did not know the entire Psalter by heart. He presided at a local council in Constantinople at which simony in the Church was anathematized. He worked miracles and, in a vision, learned of his death. Gennadius governed the Church for thirteen years and peacefully presented himself to the Lord in the year 471 A.D.

3. THE PRIESTLY-MARTYR CYPRIAN

Cyprian was born of unbelieving parents and himself was educated in polytheism. He became famous in Carthage as a teacher of philosophy and rhetoric. He was married but when he became a Christian, he ceased to live with his wife and dedicated himself to laborious study of Holy Scripture day and night and perfected his character. Because of his unusual virtues, he was chosen as a presbyter and soon after that as a bishop. As much as he was merciful toward Christians, so was he firm toward Christians. He wrote many works of instruction guided by the Holy Spirit. Especially, vehemently wrote against idolatry, Judaism and the Novatian heresy. Beautiful and sweet is his work concerning virginity, as well as of martyrdom and about charity, about patience, the Lord's Prayer and so forth. He suffered and died at the time of Valerian and Galian in the year 258 A.D. Before his death, he prayed to God, blessed the people and left twenty-five gold coins to be given to the executioner who would behead him. The unattainable greatness and generosity of a true Christian!

4. SAINT JOHN, METROPOLITAN OF KIEV

John was a Bulgarian by birth. He came to Kiev in the year 1080 A.D. and immediately attained such esteem that he was soon elevated to the throne of the Metropolitan See. John governed the Church for eight years. He wrote an epistle to Pope Clement in which he reprimanded him because of the innovations, which the Roman Church introduced. He died peacefully in the year 1089 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PRIESTLY-MARTYR CYPRIAN

Adornment of the Church, pride of Carthage,
Before and after the death of Cyprian the priest,
In word and deed, the faithful, he instructed
The pure and chaste ones, especially praising:
Chastity, says he, is the sanctity of the organs,
From the chains of passions, it is freedom
And the source of purity; the adornment of morality.
The dignity of the body and the cord of modesty,
The peace of a home, chastity is the crown of harmony,
Chastity is silence, the absence of anxiety.
When from the body, the spirit of man withdraws,
And into the realm of its own, it enters,
And of the inner world, perceives the luxury,
Then, the body to interfere, it does not allow
With insane passions, with various desires,
From worries deprived with empty luxury,
Luxury to us, an adorned woman does not proclaim
Rather an impure soul and its sinfulness.
O golden freedom, from desires of vanity,
Precious treasure of only a saint!
Chastity is freedom, chastity is silence,
From the Son of God both are gifts.
O Son of God O Good Lord
Grant us the glory of chastity and freedom.

REFLECTION

Christians do not believe in kismet, fate or destiny. Even if God determines the chief lines of our life, He, according to our prayers and merits, can change them. Thus, He prolonged King Hezekiah's life for fifteen years: **"Go and say to Hezekiah, thus said the Lord, the God of David Your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears: behold I will add unto your days fifteen years"** (Isaiah 38:5), and to the Venerable Diodorus (July 19) he likewise prolonged his life for fifteen years. God extended the life of St. Basil the Great, according to the prayer of the saint for one day until he baptized the Jew, Joseph, his physician. But, as God can, by prayer, prolong life, so He can shorten it because of sin. Emperor Anastasius adhered to the Severian heresy, so called the Acephalites (the headless ones), who spread the foolishness that the Church does not need bishops and priests but rather that everyone unto himself is a bishop and a priest and that everyone has the right, in his own way, to interpret Holy Scripture and to teach others as he understands and believes. In vain did St. John the Patriarch counsel the emperor to return to the truth of Orthodoxy, and not only did the emperor not accept the counsel but rather ill-treated the patriarch in various ways and contemplated to have him banished. One night, the emperor saw in a dream an awesome man on an exalted throne, who held a book in his hand. This man opened the book, found the name of Emperor Anastasius and said: "I have wanted to permit you to live for a while longer but, because of your heresy, behold, I am erasing fourteen years from your life." And he erased something from the book. Terrified, the emperor jumped up from his dream and related his dream to his followers. After a few days, thunder struck the emperor's place and killed Emperor Anastasius.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the rejoicing of David in the Lord (**2 Samuel 6 - 2 Kings 6**):

1. How David transferred the Ark of the Covenant from Baal of Judah to Jerusalem and how, out of joy, he danced before the Ark;
2. How Michal, his wife, sneered at David because of his dancing before the Ark, not being ashamed the women;
3. How God punished Michal for that inappropriate sneer so that Michal had no offspring until her death.

HOMILY

-About the power and the mission of Christ, as Isaiah prophesied-

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance to our God" (Isaiah 61: 1-2).

This great and programmed prophecy, the Lord Jesus read at the beginning of His saving work before the Jews in Nazareth and having read this, He sat down and said: **"Today is this scripture fulfilled"** (St. Luke 4: 16-21). One of the darkest prophecies for the Jewish scribes and priests, He read, closed the book and said: "Today is this scripture fulfilled." None of the Jews dared to touch this prophecy for no one knew to whom this prophecy pertains. Seven centuries have passed since this prophecy was spoken and written and no one knew to whom it pertains. And when that one [Christ] came, upon whom this prophecy pertains, He read it and applied it to Himself. Thus our great Lord justified His prophet and presented Himself to the world.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." Why does He speak so when He is equal to the Spirit as He is to the Father? As St. Chrysostom interprets, it is for the sake of witnessing to the people. He does not say the grace of the Spirit [is upon Me], for the grace of the Spirit is upon the faithful people but the Spirit Himself is upon Him as was manifested on the Jordan river. The Spirit is the witness of the Son and the Son was never without the Spirit for one moment. The Lord Jesus often mentions the Father and the Holy Spirit first out of infinite love, toward the Father and the Spirit and love always ascribes its own to others and second for the sake of instruction to proud men that they do not emphasize themselves but rather to give honor to others, equal to themselves.

Everything else that is said in this wonderful prophecy, the Lord fulfilled by His miraculous works, word for word. He came primarily to proclaim the mercy of God to men but at the same time, to proclaim the Dread Judgment to those who would despise and reject that mercy.

This is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the prophet of God, the true prophet.

Brethren, let us venerate Isaiah whose God-inspired mouth foretold the Savior and our salvation and let us worship without ceasing our wonderful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We worship You our Lord and Savior and we give You thanks for Your All-wise plan for our salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER -1-

1. THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH YEAR, OR THE BEGINNING OF THE INDICATION

The First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325] decreed that the Church year should begin on September 1. The month of September was, for the Hebrews, the beginning of the civil year (**Exodus 23:16**), the month of gathering the harvest and of the offering of thanks to God. It was on this feast that the Lord Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth (**Luke 4:16-21**), opened the book of the Prophet Isaiah and read the words: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn (**Isaiah 61:1-2**). The month of September is also important in the history of Christianity, because Emperor Constantine the Great was victorious over Maxentius, the enemy of the Christian Faith, in September. Following this victory, Constantine granted freedom of confession to the Christian Faith throughout the Roman Empire. For a long time, the civil year in the Christian world followed the Church year, with its beginning on September 1. The civil year was later changed, and its beginning transferred to January 1. This occurred first in Western Europe, and later in Russia, under Peter the Great.

2. THE VENERABLE SIMEON THE STYLITE

He was born in Syria of peasant parents. At the age of eighteen, he left home and was tonsured a monk. He undertook the most difficult ascetic practices, and sometimes undertook a strict fast for forty days. He eventually took upon himself a form of asceticism that was previously unknown. He stood day and night on a pillar, in unceasing prayer. At first, his pillar was six cubits high; he later raised it to twelve cubits, then to twenty-two cubits, then to thirty-six cubits, and finally to forty cubits high. On two occasions his mother Martha came to see him, but he refused to receive her, saying from atop the pillar: "Do not disturb me now, my mother. If we become worthy, then we'll see each other in the next world." St. Simeon endured countless assaults from demons, but he conquered them all by prayer to God. The saint worked many great miracles, healing by word and prayer many who were afflicted. People from all over gathered around his pillar-the rich and the poor, kings and slaves. Simeon helped everyone: healing some of infirmities, comforting those in need, instructing others, and reproaching some who held heretical beliefs. Thus, he turned Empress Eudocia from the Eutychian heresy and brought her back to Orthodoxy. He lived the ascetic life during the reigns of the Emperors Theodosius the Younger, Marcian and Leo the Great. Simeon, the first great stylite in Christianity and a great miracle-worker, lived to be 103 years old. He reposed in the Lord on September 1, 459. His relics were translated to Antioch, to the church dedicated to his name.

3. SAINT JOSHUA, THE SON OF NUN

Joshua was the leader of the Hebrew people after the death of Moses. Of several hundred thousand Jews who came out of Egypt, only he and Caleb entered the Promised Land. Joshua lived to be 110 years old, and died approximately 1440 years before the Nativity of Christ. (Read of his faithfulness to God, his works and his miracles in the Book of Joshua.)

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SIMEON THE STYLITE

Simeon the Stylite, the first of the pillar-dwellers,
An illuminated elder, with the radiance of an immortal,
Bound himself to the pillar as a willing sacrifice;
He was fully alive to heaven, and dead to the earth.
Fasting and prayer and all-night vigils-
By this hard path he sought salvation.
Early one morning, his mother came by:
"O Son, come down and let your mother see you!"
Thus she spoke, but Simeon was silent.
The mother repeated her plea again and again....
Simeon at last replied to his mother:
"I am in the service of the Heavenly King.
This life is a struggle and a preparation.
There is no time for empty conversation here.
But go, Mother, and choose the pure path-
Take care for your soul and live according to Christ!
After the present struggle is the next world;
If Christ finds us worthy,
You will see your son there, Mother,
And your son will delight in his mother's face."

REFLECTION

We should use all that is necessary in this world for the cultivation of our souls, for when death separates us from this world we will take nothing to the other world except our souls, in whatever state they have been formed here. When he was eighteen, St. Simeon the Stylite was so concerned about the salvation of his soul that one day he fell face down on the earth and prayed to God that He would show him the path of salvation. And lying thus in prayer for a long time, he had a vision that he was digging a trench for a foundation and, exhausted from digging, stopped to catch his breath. A voice spoke to him, saying: "Dig deeper!" Then he began, with greater labor and effort, to dig yet deeper. Again he stopped to catch his breath. But again he heard the voice: "Dig deeper!" He again began to dig, with even greater labor and effort. At this the voice spoke to him again: "Stop, it is sufficient! Now build what you wish to build; for without labor, you will succeed in nothing." Those who labor little, and build the life of their soul on sensual shallowness, build on sand, which cannot uphold anything, even in this transitory world-and even more so in eternity.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the lawlessness of David (**II Samuel 11**):

1. How David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, while Uriah was away at war;
2. How David arranged the death of Uriah;
3. How God became angered with David.

HOMILY

-on the Word, the Son of God-

In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1).

The Logos-the rational, intelligent Word-existed in the beginning. This pertains to the Divine Nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, by saying, In the beginning, do we think that the Word of God has a beginning? Or that there was a certain date in time when the Son of God was born of God the Father? In no way! For the birth of the Son of God can have neither a date nor a beginning, since time is a condition of this transient world, and it does not affect the eternal God, and therefore does not affect anything at all that is of God. Can the sun remain the sun, if the sunlight is separated from it? Will a man remain a man, if his mind is taken away? Would honey still be honey, if its sweetness is separated from it? It cannot. Even less can one conceive of God as separate from His Logos, from His rational Word, from His Intelligence, from His Wisdom-the eternal Father separate from His co-eternal Son.

No, brethren, the words are not about the beginning of the Son of God from God the Father, but rather about the beginning of the history of the created world and the salvation of mankind. This beginning is in the Word of God, in the Son of God. He began both the creation of the world and the salvation of the world. Whoever would speak of the creation of the visible or invisible worlds, or of the salvation of mankind, must begin with the Beginning. And that Beginning is the Word of God, the Wisdom of God, the Son of God. For example, if someone were telling a story about boating on a lake, he might begin it like this: "In the beginning there was a lake, and on it sailed a white boat..." No reasonable person would interpret the words, "In the beginning there was a lake..." to mean that the lake came into existence on the same day that the boat sailed on it. Thus, no rational man could take the words of the Evangelist, In the beginning was the Word..., as though the Word of God came forth from God at the same moment that the world was created! Just as the lake existed for thousands of years before the boat sailed on it, so the Word of God existed for a whole eternity before the beginning of creation.

O Son of God, co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, enlighten us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR MAMAS

He was born in Paphlagonia of renowned Christian parents, Theodotus and Rufina. His parents were cast into prison for Christ's name. His father died first in prison, and as soon as Rufina bore Mamas, she also died. Thus the newborn child was left alone between the dead bodies of his parents. However, God the Provider sent an angel to a noble widow, Ammia. Ammia saw the angel in a dream: he told her to go to the prison and take the child in. The local eparch granted Ammia permission to bury the dead and to take the child to her home. When Mamas reached his fifth year, he began to talk and his first word was "Mama!"-for which he received the name "Mamas." In school, Mamas displayed unusual intelligence, and as he had been reared in a Christian spirit, he did not hide his faith, but confessed it to the other children and laughed at the idols. During the reign of Aurelian there was a bitter persecution of Christians. The pagans did not even spare the Christian children. Mamas was fifteen years old when he was brought before the emperor. The emperor told him that he needed only to deny Christ verbally. Mamas replied: "Neither in my heart nor with my lips will I renounce my God and King, Jesus Christ." The emperor ordered him to be beaten, burned with torches, and finally thrown into the sea. But an angel of God saved him, and took him to a high mountain near Caesarea. There he lived in solitude and prayer. Even the wild beasts were tamed by his sanctity. He was finally discovered by his persecutors and subjected to torture again. When he had overcome torture both by fire and by wild beasts, St. Mamas was run through with a trident by a pagan priest. Thus he gave his holy soul to God, to Whom he had been faithful during all of his tortures. From his relics many healings of the sick have taken place.

2. SAINT JOHN THE FASTER, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

He is also celebrated on August 30. He was at first a goldsmith, but because of his great and many acts of mercy-and by God's providence-he was ordained a priest. Once, when he was a young man, John was walking with Eusebius, an old monk from Palestine. Suddenly, a bodiless voice spoke to Eusebius: "Abba, do not walk to the right of the great John." It was the voice of God, foretelling the great service to which John would shortly be called. After the Blessed Eutychius, John was chosen to be Patriarch of Constantinople. He did not want to accept this but, having been frightened by a certain heavenly vision, he accepted. He was a great faster, intercessor and miracle-worker right up to his death. He reposed in the year 595. After his death, his only personal possessions were found to be a wooden spoon, a linen shirt and an old garment. His writings on repentance and confession are well known.

3. SAINT ELEAZAR

Eleazar was the son of Aaron, and second in order of the high priests of Israel. He assisted Moses during the census of the people of Israel, and assisted Joshua the son of Nun in apportioning the Promised Land among the Twelve Tribes. He faithfully guarded the Ark of the Covenant in Shiloh and reposed peacefully.

4. THE FEAST OF THE MIRACLE OF THE KALUGA ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD.

[See the "Reflection" below.]

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR MAMAS

Mamas the pious was born in prison,
And was kindred with Christ from his first day;
His father and mother, martyrs for God,
Birthed their only child in prison darkness.
For fifteen years, orphaned Mamas
Was alone in the prison of the world.
His only comfort and his only light
Shone upon him from the countenance of the Son of God:
This was his fulfillment and his wealth.
Mamas glorified Christ his God,
He glorified Him in word and in deed
By his prayerful soul and innocent body.
His friendship with God was more dear to him
Than the devious world that torments and lies.
He loved God and His pure Christ
And he became a friend to pure nature-
To the wilderness and forest and wild beasts,
To wild goats and fierce lions.
And God endowed his friend
With wondrous gifts of the Holy Spirit.
And Mamas shamed his persecutors,
And turned many torturers to Christ.
The emperor and the empire were against this boy,
But the right hand of God sustained him-
And, enduring torments, Mamas glorified the Savior.
The emperor and the empire collapsed to nothing,
While Mamas reigns, even now, with Christ,
And rejoices with the angels of God in heaven.

REFLECTION

The life of the Orthodox Church provides us with numerous examples of how Almighty God manifests His power through small and lifeless things-especially those things that serve as signs of the Incarnation, life and suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such things include the Cross, icons of the Theotokos and the saints, holy water, oil, myrrh, and so forth. For example, a miracle was wrought through an icon of the Holy Mother of God in the year 1748, in the home of a boyar named Khitrov, near the Russian city of Kaluga. Two of the boyar's servants, rummaging in Khitrov's attic one day, came upon a rolled-up piece of cloth that depicted the beautiful image of a woman's face. The image emanated holiness and piety. One of the servants was humble and modest, while the other was vain and talkative. The former, looking at the image on the cloth, called it "The Abbess." Evdokia-the vain and talkative one, whose name we know-did not honor this name, but coarsely mocked her humble companion. To give even more force to her vulgarity, she spat on the painting. At that instant Evdokia fell to the ground, writhing with her whole body, blind and dumb, and began foaming at the mouth. That night the Theotokos appeared to the parents of the unfortunate girl, and told them what had happened to their daughter. She told them to get a priest and have him pray before the image that had been found and sprinkle the girl with holy water, and then she would be healed. When this was done, Evdokia was healed, and from then on she amended her disposition and was more modest. Thus was a miracle-working icon of the Holy Theotokos discovered. This icon was taken to a church in Kaluga, where it can be found today, still working miracles.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's punishment of David for his adultery and murder (**II Samuel 12**):

1. How God, speaking through the prophet Nathan, told David that because he took another's wife, his own wives would be taken by other men;
2. That his son would die;
3. That the sword would not depart from his house-all of which came to pass.

HOMILY

-on the Word of God, the Creator of the world-

**It [the Word] was in the beginning in God.
Everything came into existence by Him (John 1:2-3).**

Brethren, the Evangelist is speaking of the wondrous Logos of God, of the rational, intelligent Word, of the eternal Wisdom of God, of the co-eternal Son of God. This wondrous Word is of one Essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, yet hypostatically different from the Father and the Spirit, for He was begotten of the Unbegotten Father. He always was, is, and shall be. When was the Word in God? The Evangelist says: In the beginning. What does In the beginning mean? It means the same as "first" or "first of all." So, first of all, the Word of God was in God, and has always been of one being with the Father, and has always been the Son, in hypostasis, but not yet incarnate. Later, the Word of God became incarnate, and appeared in a body for the sake of mankind. When He was still the unincarnate Word in God, everything came into existence by Him. Heaven and earth, and the whole inhabited heavenly and earthly worlds-everything came into existence by Him, by the Word of God, when He was in God, and not yet incarnate. Without the Word of God, no created thing came into existence. He was Life and Light, and the Light shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not (**John 1:5**). First of all, death and sin represent darkness. That darkness did not overcome the Son of God. The whole created world itself is darkness before God, yet in this darkness shines the Word of God, the Wisdom of God, rational, intelligent and majestic. All of creation would be in utter darkness if the mystical light of the Son of God-by Whom all things were created-did not illuminate it.

It [the Word] was in the beginning in God-then what happened? And the Word was made flesh (**John 1:14**). The history of the creation of the world leads up to this point, and from this point the history of man's salvation begins. In taking on flesh, the Word of God did not estrange Himself from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit-for the Divine Trinity is undivided-but, rather, He clothed Himself in the body and soul of man, so that, in the shadow of the body, He, the Sun of suns, could draw near to men and save men.

O my brethren, how sweet and inexpressibly wonderful is the mystery of the Incarnation of God. If we embrace this mystery with our heart, it will be easier to approach it with our mind.

O Lord, gentle Savior, the glory of the Father and the joy of the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HIEROMARTYR ANTHIMUS

He was born in Nicomedia, and was raised from childhood as a true Christian. "His body was mortified, his spirit humbled, his envy uprooted, his anger subdued, his sloth banished.... He had love for all and peace with all; he was prudent with all, had zeal for the glory of God and was forthright with all." It is no wonder that a man with such virtues was appointed bishop. St. Anthimus governed as Bishop of Nicomedia during the cruel persecution of Christians under the villainous Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. Streams of Christian blood were shed, especially in Nicomedia. One year, on the Feast of Christ's Nativity, twenty thousand martyrs were burned to death in one church (see December 28). This took place during the time of Anthimus's episcopacy. Even so, the persecution did not end with this, but continued, and many Christians were cast into prison and kept there for torture and death. St. Anthimus withdrew to the village of Semana, not because he was fleeing from death, but in order to continue encouraging his flock in the feat of martyrdom, so that no one would fall away out of fear. One of his letters to the Christians in prison was intercepted and turned over to Emperor Maximian. The emperor dispatched twenty soldiers to find Anthimus and bring him to him. The gray-haired and clairvoyant elder came out to meet the soldiers, brought them to his house, and treated them as guests-and only then revealed that he was Anthimus, whom they were seeking. The soldiers, astonished by Anthimus's kindness, suggested that he hide, saying they would tell the emperor that they could not find him. But Anthimus replied that he could not let himself transgress God's commandment against falsehood to save his life, and he went with the soldiers. Along the way, all the soldiers came to believe in Christ and were baptized by Anthimus. The emperor had Anthimus harshly tortured for a long time, and then had him beheaded with an axe. He glorified the Lord and went to his rest at the beginning of the fourth century.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR BASILISSA

Basilissa was a nine-year-old girl. She was martyred in Nicomedia not long after the death of St. Anthimus. The torturers covered her whole body with wounds, but she remained faithful to Christ. God preserved her unharmed from fire and wild beasts, which caused her torturer, Alexander, to repent and embrace the Christian Faith. Basilissa then went out into a field, fell to her knees, and prayed thankfully to God that she had endured the tortures, and with that she gave up her spirit to God, in about the year 309.

3. SAINT JOANIKIJE, ARCHBISHOP AND FIRST PATRIARCH OF SERBIA

Joanikije was born in Prizren, and initially served as secretary to King Dushan. He became archbishop in 1339, and was elevated to the rank of patriarch in 1346. Joanikije was a zealous archpastor and organizer of the Serbian Church, "a great upholder of the laws of the Church." He entered into rest on September 3, 1349. His relics repose in the Patriarchate of Pech.

4. THE VENERABLE THEOCTISTUS

He was a faster and fellow ascetic of St. Euthymius the Great. Theoctistus was abbot of Euthymius's Lavra, located some six miles from Jerusalem on the road to Jericho. In all things he was a disciple of St. Euthymius under whose spiritual guidance he governed the monastery until the age of ninety. He pleased God by his life, and reposed in the middle of the fifth century during the reign of Anastasius, Patriarch of Jerusalem.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HIEROMARTYR ANTHIMUS

Holy Anthimus encouraged his flock:
"My children, my beloved children,
Bearers of Christ's yoke,
Now is the time for great renunciation,
O soldiers of the Crucified Christ,
Who gloriously resurrected from the dead!
Now is the time of cruel persecution;
Now is the time of struggle and patience;
For the harvest of heroes is prepared.
The brilliant wreath is radiant above you:
Fear not the dark executioners
For the power of man does not last forever,
But the power of God lasts unto ages of ages.
Blessed is he who fears God!
Your tears will be wiped away
In heaven by the hands of angels;
Your wounds will be healed
In heaven with paradisaal balm.
Death will be transformed into life!
The despised will be crowned with a wreath!
Brief torture, but eternal blessings.
My dear children, do not fear."

REFLECTION

He who desires to be saved must be absolutely obedient to spiritual authority. Without this obedience, a man can perish even with the greatest desire for salvation. The great saints, who prescribed obedience as the condition for salvation, also fulfilled the act of obedience to perfection. When St. Simeon chose the pillar for his asceticism, it struck the other ascetics as some kind of novelty. Because they did not know if this form of asceticism was of the Spirit of God or of the spirit of pride, the desert fathers sent spiritual men to determine the answer. The monks were to command Simeon in their name to come down from the pillar. If he did not want to come down, it would have meant that his elevation on the pillar was from the spirit of pride. But if he obeyed the command and began to descend, they were to leave him as he was, for his readiness to obey would show that his asceticism was from the Holy Spirit. When those sent arrived and told Simeon that the council of the holy fathers of the desert commanded him to descend from the pillar, Simeon immediately began to climb down the ladder. Seeing his obedience, they cried out to him rejoicing: "Do not come down, holy Father, but remain where you are. We see now that your asceticism is of God."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's punishment of David for his sins (**II Samuel 13**):

1. How Amnon, David's son, defiled David's daughter, Tamara;
2. How Absalom, David's son, slew Amnon his brother because of this;
3. How David wept bitterly.

HOMILY

-on the Word of God revealed in the flesh-

And the Word was made flesh (John 1:14).

Here, brethren, is a new, blessed and salvific beginning for us-the beginning of our salvation. Adam was in the flesh when he fell under the authority of sin and death. Now the Creator of Adam has appeared in the flesh, to deliver Adam and Adam's posterity from the power of sin and death. The Son of God-the Word, Wisdom, Light and Life-descended among men in human flesh and with a human soul. He was incarnate but not divided from His Divinity. He descended without being separated from His Father. He retained all that He had been and would be for all eternity, and yet He received something new: human nature. His eternal attributes were not diminished by the Incarnation, neither was His relationship to the Father and the Spirit changed. Lo, the Father testified to this, both on the Jordan and on Mount Tabor: **This is my beloved Son!** He did not say: "This was my Son," but "This is my Son." The Holy Spirit was with Him at His bodily conception and throughout His mission on earth. The divine and human nature were united in Him, but not intermingled. How? Do not ask, you who do not even know how to explain yourself to yourself, and cannot say how your soul and body are united in you. Only know this: God came to visit the earth, bringing unspeakably rich treasures for mankind-royal gifts, incorruptible, eternal, priceless and irreplaceable gifts. Know this and let your heart dance for joy. Strive to cleanse your hands, purify your senses, wash your soul, whiten your heart, and set your mind straight, that you may receive the royal gifts. For they are not given to the unclean.

O Lord Jesus Christ, help us to cleanse and wash ourselves by Thy blood and Thy Spirit, that we may be made worthy of Thy royal gifts.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER - 4 -

1. THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR BABYLAS

This ``great and wonderful man, if he could be called a man"-as St. John Chrysostom spoke of him-was Bishop of Antioch during the reign of the wicked Emperor Numerian. This Numerian concluded a peace treaty with a barbarian king, who was more noble and peace-loving than he. As a sign of his sincere desire for a lasting peace, the barbarian king gave his young son to be brought up and educated in Numerian's court. One day Numerian stabbed this innocent boy to death with his own hands, and offered him as a sacrifice to the idols. Still hot from the crime and the innocent blood, this criminal with an emperor's crown went to a Christian church to see what was going on there. St. Babylas was at prayer with the people, and heard that the emperor had come with his retinue and desired to enter the church. Babylas interrupted the service, went out in front of the church, and told the emperor that as he was an idolater he could not enter the holy temple where the one, true God was glorified. In a homily about Babylas, St. John Chrysostom said: ``Who else in the world would he fear-he who, with such authority, repulsed the emperor?... By this, he taught emperors not to overreach their authority beyond the measure given to them by God, and he also showed the clergy how to use their own authority." The shamed emperor turned back, but planned revenge. The following day, he summoned Babylas and berated him, urging him to offer sacrifice to the idols, which, of course, the saint steadfastly refused to do. The emperor then bound Babylas and cast him into prison. The emperor also tortured three children: Urban, age twelve, Prilidian, age nine, and Hippolitus, age seven. Babylas was their spiritual father and teacher, and they, out of love for him, had not run away. They were the sons of Christodula, an honorable Christian woman who had herself suffered for Christ. The emperor first ordered that each child be beaten with a number of blows corresponding to his years, and then had them cast into prison. He finally had all three beheaded with the sword. The chained Babylas was present at the beheading of the children and encouraged them. After that, he laid his own honorable head under the sword. He was buried in his chains by the Christians, in the same grave as those three wondrous children, as he had willed before his martyrdom. Their holy souls flew off to their heavenly habitation, while their miracle-working relics remained for the benefit of the faithful, as a constant witness to their heroism in the Faith. They suffered in about the year 250.

2. THE HOLY PROPHET MOSES THE GOD-SEER

Moses was a great leader and the lawgiver of Israel. He was born in Egypt in about 1550 b.c. For forty years, he lived at the court of the pharaoh; for forty years, he lived as a shepherd in contemplation of God and the world; and for his remaining forty years, he led the people through the wilderness to the Promised Land. He beheld the Promised Land, but was not allowed to enter it, for he had once sinned against God (**Numbers 20:12**). Moses reposed at the age of 120. As a miracle-worker, he was a prefiguring of Christ, according to St. Basil the Great. He appeared from the other world on Mount Tabor during the Lord's Transfiguration. According to the witness of St. John Climacus, he appeared also to the monks in the Monastery of Mount Sinai.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS MARCELLUS AND CASSIAN

Emperor Maximian Hercules once issued a command that all of his soldiers had to offer sacrifices to the idols. Marcellus was a soldier at that time, and Cassian was a notary (secretary). Marcellus, a Christian, declared: ``If the military calling is bound up with sacrifice to idols, then I cannot be a soldier!" He removed his military belt and arms and cast them aside. He was immediately sentenced to death. Cassian's duty was to write Marcellus's death sentence, but he refused to write it. They were beheaded together, and their souls took up habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR BABYLAS

**Before the doors of the holy temple
The wonderful shepherd bravely stood.
The bloody emperor wanted to enter,
But the shepherd would not let him.**

**``You know nothing of the true God;
You bow down before idols.
What do you seek, foul pagan,
Among right-believing Christians?"**

**The stubborn emperor turned violent
And chained Babylas.
Yet, smiling at the emperor,
Babylas glorified His Lord.**

**And the emperor sneered at the saint:
``Behold, these chains fit you nicely-
Just your size, contemptible old man-
Just as if they were tailored for you!"**

**Thus spoke the emperor, and he fell silent.
And Babylas replied to the emperor:
``I swear to you, that this iron
Is more precious to me than gold.**

**``These chains have more worth
Than your royal diadem!
O Emperor, I value them more
Than your entire realm.**

**``Because I wear these chains for Christ.
They are the price of my freedom,
For I shall dwell in eternity,
And by these chains I will enter therein."**

REFLECTION

A saint's power after his death is often many times greater than in life. ``That is why God left us the relics of the saints," says St. John Chrysostom in his unsurpassable homily on St. Babylas. St. Babylas was buried in the city of Antioch. At that time, Emperor Gallus-the brother of Julian the Apostate-was reigning together with Constantius, the son of Constantine the Great. Inspired by piety, Gallus translated the relics of St. Babylas to the outskirts of Daphne and built a small church, placing the relics of the martyr in it. There was a famous temple of Apollo in Daphne, built on the spot where, according to a pagan legend, a virgin had turned into a laurel tree in order to be saved from the ``god" Apollo, who was pursuing her out of unrestrained fleshly passion for her. There stood the idol of Apollo, which allegedly could foretell anyone's future. But, as the relics of Babylas now rested in the vicinity of the temple, the demon from the idol fell silent and ceased making prophesies. Later, when Emperor Julian the Apostate set out on his catastrophic war with the Persians, he visited the temple of Apollo and consulted the idol about the outcome of his impending war. The idol responded with trepidation that it could not render a clear response ``because of the dead" buried in its proximity. Of course, that pertained to Babylas, the presence of whose body had silenced the demon. Julian ordered that the relics of Babylas be transported back to Antioch. However, as soon as the relics of the martyr were removed, fire fell from heaven and consumed the temple of Apollo, destroying it forever. Julian set out against the Persians and his blasphemous life came to a horrible end. Such was the power of Christ's martyr after death: he silenced the demon, brought down fire from heaven, destroyed the idolatrous temple, and punished the apostate emperor with a dishonorable death.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's punishment of David for his sins (**II Samuel 15**):

1. How Absalom, David's son, raised a rebellion against his father;
2. How David fled from Jerusalem before his son, and went barefoot and wept.

HOMILY

-on the changing of water into wine-

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee (John 2:11).

Our God is Almighty; and His power has no limit and is beyond description. He created all that was created by His Word: By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made (**Psalms 33:6**). By His Word, He created the body of man. By the Word of God, lifeless earth is transformed into the bodies of men, animals and plants. By the Word of God, flowing water is changed into vapor, and vapor into ice and snow. By this same Word, the water in a vine is changed into wine, wine that maketh glad the heart of man (**Psalms 104:15**). Therefore, how difficult a miracle was it for the Word of God Incarnate-Christ our Lord-to change water into wine in Cana? For us men, darkened by sin, this is a great miracle; for our nature, weakened by sin, it is an unattainable miracle. Yet, isn't the working of miracles the usual occupation of the Creator? When the servants filled the six large vessels with water, the Lord Christ said to them: Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast (**John 2:8**). He did not even say, ``**Let the water become wine,**" he merely thought it. For God's thoughts have the same power as His words.

Why is it said that this was the ``**beginning of miracles,**" when it appears that, long before this miracle, the Lord worked other miracles? Because, brethren, the changing of water into wine is the fundamental miracle of Christ, and is the essence of all His miracles. Human nature was diluted with its own tears, and it was necessary to change it into wine. The divine spark in man was extinguished, and it was necessary to rekindle it. Infirmary is like water, health is like wine; the impurities of the evil spirits are like water, purity is like wine; death is like water, life is like wine; ignorance is like water, truth is like wine. Hence, whenever the Lord made the sick whole, the impure pure, the dead alive, and prodigals enlightened, He essentially turned water into wine.

O Lord our God, Thou miraculous Transformer of water into wine: bring Thy divine flame to our extinguished hearth. Transform the water of our being into divine wine, that we may be like unto Thee-and that we may thus abide with Thee in Thine Immortal Kingdom, with Thy radiant angels.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER - 5 -

1. THE HOLY PROPHET ZACHARIAS

He was the father of St. John the Forerunner. Zacharias was the son of Barachias, from the lineage of Abia, of the sons of Aaron. Zacharias was a high priest who held the eighth degree of service in the Temple at Jerusalem. His wife Elizabeth was the daughter of Sophia and sister of St. Anna, who was the mother of the Holy Theotokos. During the reign of King Herod the child-slayer, Zacharias was serving one day at the Temple of Jerusalem according to his turn. An angel of God appeared to him in the sanctuary, and Zacharias had great fear. The angel said to him: **Fear not, Zacharias (Luke 1:13)**, and announced that Elizabeth would bear a son, in answer to their prayers. But both Zacharias and Elizabeth were old. When Zacharias doubted the words of the heavenly herald, the angel said: **I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God (Luke 1:19)**. Zacharias was struck dumb from that hour, and could not speak until his son was born and he had written on a tablet: **His name is John (Luke 1:63)**. Then his speech returned, and he magnified God. Some time later, when the Lord Jesus had been born and Herod began to slaughter the children of Bethlehem, he sent men to find and kill the son of Zacharias-for Herod had heard all that had happened to Zacharias, and how John had been born. Upon seeing the soldiers coming, Elizabeth took John into her arms-he was a year and a half old at that time-fled from the house with him, and ran to a rocky and desolate place. When she saw the soldiers following her, she cried out to the mountain: ``O mountain of God, receive a mother with her child!" and the rock opened and hid the mother and child. Then Herod, enraged that the child John had not been slain, ordered that Zacharias be slain before the altar. The blood of Zacharias was spilled on the marble and dried solid as stone, and remained as a witness to Herod's evil deed. In the place where Elizabeth hid with John a cave opened, water flowed out of it, and a fruit-bearing palm grew, all by the power of God. Forty days after the death of Zacharias, the blessed Elizabeth died. The child John remained in the wilderness, fed by an angel and protected by God's providence, until the day he appeared at the Jordan.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS JUVENTIUS AND MAXIMINUS

Little is known about the life of these two holy men, but their suffering for Christ is known from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom praising them. They were soldiers during the rule of Emperor Julian the Apostate. In conversation with others during a military feast, they condemned the emperor for his persecution of Christians. Someone told the emperor of this, and he had them thrown into prison. Some of the emperor's men visited them with the intention of turning them away from the true Faith. They told Juventius and Maximinus that many of their companions had denied Christ. To this, the two nobly replied: ``Then we must stand bravely, and offer ourselves as a sacrifice for their apostasy." They were beheaded with the sword in the dark of night, but their relics were found and were revealed to be miracle-working.

3. SEVENTY HOLY MARTYRS

Headed by Urban, Theodore and Medimnus, these men were chosen from among the Christians of Constantinople during the Emperor Valens's persecution of Orthodoxy, as the most respected and distinguished citizens of the capital, to go to Nicomedia to implore the heretical emperor (an Arian) to at least spare the lives of Orthodox Christians. The emperor became enraged and told them to go back, but secretly ordered his sailors to set the boat on fire when they were at sea, and to save themselves in a dinghy. The wicked servants of the even more wicked master did this. The bodies of these glorious seventy martyrs were burned and drowned in the sea, but their souls swam on to the haven of eternal blessedness.

4. THE VENERABLE ATHANASIUS

He labored in asceticism in Vilnius, and was later the abbot of a monastery in Brest. Because of his unwavering faith in Orthodoxy, he was beheaded by the Roman Catholics on September 5, 1648. His miracle-working relics repose in Brest.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE SEVENTY HOLY MARTYRS

Why is the midnight sea so bright?
What manner of terrible flame springs from the water?
It is the tongue of malice, which speaks with fire,
And burns a ship at sea.
The heretical emperor mocks Orthodoxy,
And burns seventy friends with fire.
It is the feast of Valens, a bestial emperor-
A heretic is often more cruel than an unbeliever.
Seventy deaths! For what crime?
For having stood before the emperor's face with an appeal,
Imploring that he spare the innocent-
For this, he burned them with fire.

The dry boat burned like straw in a stack,
The flame ascended to heaven like an accusation:
The men all knelt in the flames
And raised up a prayer to God and the saints:
``Accept our sacrifice, O All-seeing God!
Help us to sail to the Heavenly Kingdom!"
In the raging flames, the bodies gave off a fragrance,
Like pure incense before the holy altar.
These are the pure sacrifices of Holy Orthodoxy
Strengthened by torture, and glorifying God.
The sea cools the seventy bodies,
And seventy souls take delight in Paradise!
In the Church, their glory is proclaimed,
But the disgraced Valens faces God's punishment.

REFLECTION

Men strive in vain to discover those things that God intentionally conceals from them. If God had not permitted, men would never have found gold and silver beneath the earth, or the power of steam or the glow of electrical light. In vain, Herod slaughtered countless children in Bethlehem in order to slay One. That One was hidden from the sight and sword of Herod. In vain did Herod seek John. Behold the wonder: soldiers pursued the aged Elizabeth, who was fleeing with John in her arms-and could not catch up with her! The enraged Herod summoned Zacharias and demanded: ``Give me your son John!" The aged priest meekly replied: ``I am now serving the Lord God of Israel. I know not where my son is." Insane with rage, Herod ordered Zacharias slain in place of John. The servants of the king entered the Temple and asked Zacharias: ``Where have you hidden your son? Give him to us for the king has so ordered. If you do not give him to us, you yourself will die." Zacharias replied: ``You will kill my body but the Lord will receive my soul." Thus Zacharias was slain, but Herod was not content with that. The wicked king had no peace, day or night, for he was tormented by a foreboding that John could be that newborn king proclaimed by the Magi from the East. Herod tried to find him, but in vain, for God had intentionally hidden him.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's punishment of David for his sins (**II Samuel 17**):

1. How Absalom warred with his father and how many people died in that war;
2. How Absalom perished;
3. How David wept bitterly.

HOMILY

-on the necessity of a second or spiritual birth-

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Thus the Lord Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, and Nicodemus asked in amazement: ``How can this be?" That is, how can a man be born again? Even to this day, many ask: ``How can a sensual man become a spiritual man?" ``How can a sinner become a righteous one?" ``How can the grace of God enter a man and replace his sensual thoughts and will?" ``How can the Holy Spirit illuminate the heart of man?" ``How can water be changed into wine?" We know that when the Spirit of God descended upon the apostles, they became different men-new men, reborn men. We also know, from thousands of examples, how men of sensual thoughts and sensual life became spiritual men, regenerated men. Therefore, we know that it happened then and happens now, by the action of the grace of God the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary for us to ask how this happens. It is enough for us to know that it does happen, and to strive that it happen in us, for the grace of the Spirit is given to everyone who seeks it and prepares himself to be able to receive it. There is no more difficult task than to explain spiritual things to men who think and judge only sensually. St. John Chrysostom says: ``A soul which is given over to passions cannot achieve anything great and noble, for it suffers from a grievous blindness, like that of eyes darkened by the flow of pus." Usually the most sensual men inquire about the greatest divine mysteries. They do not inquire about that in order to know how they can be saved, but rather to confuse the faithful and to ridicule the Faith, and to justify their own sinful and passionate life. Unable to raise themselves to the first rung of the heavenly ladder, they fantasize about the last rung. Brethren, when such as these inquire about the profoundest mysteries of the regeneration of the soul and the Kingdom of Heaven, ask them, first of all, to fulfill the ten basic commandments of God. If they do this, then their souls will be opened to the understanding of the Divine Mysteries, inasmuch as that understanding is necessary for the cleansing of their sins and passions, and for eternal salvation.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our Most-gracious and All-wise Teacher, help us to understand with our minds, and embrace with our hearts, as much of Thy wisdom as is necessary for our salvation. Help us to keep ourselves from undue curiosity.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER - 6 -

1. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE MIRACLES OF THE HOLY ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

Near Hierapolis, in Phrygia, there was a place called Chonae ("plunging"), and in that place there was a spring of miraculous water. When Apostle John the Theologian, accompanied by Philip, preached the Gospel in Hierapolis, he looked upon that place and prophesied that a spring of miraculous water would open up there, from which many would receive healing, and that the great Archangel of God Michael would visit that place. Soon afterward, this prophecy was fulfilled: a spring of water burst forth and became widely known for its miraculous power. A pagan in Laodicea had a daughter who was mute, which caused him great sorrow. Archangel Michael appeared to him in a dream, and told him to take his daughter to the spring, where she would be cured. The father immediately obeyed, brought his daughter to the spring, and found many people there seeking deliverance from various infirmities. These people were all Christians. The man asked how he should seek healing, and the Christians told him: "You must pray to the Archangel Michael, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The man prayed in this way, gave his daughter a drink of this water, and the girl began to speak. The pagan, his daughter and his whole household were baptized. He also built a church over the spring dedicated to the Archangel Michael.

Later, a young man named Archippus settled there and lived a life of austerity, in fasting and prayer. The pagans did many malicious things to Archippus, for they did not like the fact that this Christian holy place emanated such spiritual power and attracted so many people to it. The pagans, in their wickedness, rerouted the nearest river in order to flood the church and the spring. By the prayers of Archippus, the holy Archangel Michael opened a fissure in the rock beside the church, and the river's water plunged into it. This is how that place was saved and why it was called Chonae, or "of the plunging," for the river's water that plunged into the open fissure. St. Archippus labored in asceticism there until the age of seventy, and peacefully reposed in the Lord.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ROMULUS AND 11,000 SOLDIERS

While Emperor Trajan waged war in the East, he once commanded that the Christians in his army be counted. It was found that there were 11,000 Christians in the imperial army. The emperor then ordered that they all be dismissed from the army and sent to Armenia. St. Romulus was the overseer of the imperial household. He went before the emperor and reprimanded him for this action, declaring himself a Christian. The emperor gave order that Romulus be beheaded. Of those banished soldiers, the emperor had 10,000 of them crucified. The others were slain by various tortures.

3. SAINT EUDOXIUS

Eudoxius was a commander in the Roman army. He suffered for Christ during the reign of Diocletian. He was tried and tortured by the governor of Melitene in Armenia. His friends Zeno and Macarius also suffered with him, as well as 1104 other soldiers who had been converted to Christianity by Eudoxius. After his death Eudoxius appeared to his wife Basilissa, who remained faithful to Christ to the time of her peaceful repose.

4. THE VENERABLE DAVID

He was the leader of a band of robbers near Hermopolis, in Egypt. He came to his senses only in his later years, when he repented and was tonsured a monk. The Archangel Gabriel appeared to David and granted him miraculous power. After many difficult ascetic practices, David became worthy of the Kingdom of God and reposed peacefully in the sixth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

**Archangel of God
Michael the Commander,
The sword-bearing servant
Of the Lord Most-high.**

**He stands before the Lord
With the heavenly hosts,
With the mighty angels
And the holy souls.**

**The greatest commander
Of the Greatest King,
Wherever he goes, he conquers
And works miracles.**

**He is the one whom Satan
Fears like flame,
For the commander of God
Stands for truth.**

**He stands for truth,
And upholds justice;
Fast as sight
He can be anywhere swiftly.**

**The commander of light,
He drives the impure away,
And with his wings
Protects the faithful.**

REFLECTION

Christianity has uprooted many barbaric customs from the society of man. But some of those customs-praiseworthy from the pagan point of view, but shameful from the Christian point of view-are, even to the present day, like hidden corruption oozing from a supposedly healed wound. One of these customs is the unlawful kidnapping of maidens. St. Basil wrote powerfully to one of his priests, after one such incident: ``Do all in your power to find and rescue this maiden. Then, return her to her parents and excommunicate the perpetrator. Also suspend those who abetted him-including their entire households-from participation in services for three years. Likewise, suspend everyone in the village to which the maiden was taken, where she was hidden or perhaps kept by force-so that all will know that a kidnapper should be driven away from them like a serpent or some other wild beast or common enemy, and that the abused should be protected."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the example of David's self-restraint (**II Samuel 23**):

1. How, during battle against the Philistines, David became thirsty, and asked who would bring him water from the well in Bethlehem, which was held by the Philistines;
2. How three heroes slipped through the enemy lines, and brought water back to their king;
3. How David did not want to drink, but rather poured the water on the ground, saying: Is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?

HOMILY

-on the two births-

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6).

Brethren, these words are not the words of a prophet or an apostle, but are the words of the Lord Himself, uttered with His most pure mouth. As there is power and salvation in every one of the Lord's words, so is there power and salvation in these. That is why it is necessary to study these words with fear and great care and apply them in our lives. By these words the Lord emphasizes the precedence of the spirit over the flesh. And, as the flesh is born of the body, so the spirit must be born of the Spirit. The birth of our spirit is of the Spirit of God, according to the grace of God and not according to nature. It is the new birth that the Lord described to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus did not understand these words of Christ, just as, even today, he whose flesh is stronger than his spirit does not understand them. Men whose flesh has overcome their spirit think and judge everything according to the body. Men whose spirit has overcome their body think and judge everything according to the spirit. All those who think and judge according to the body make their spirits fleshly, while all who think and judge spiritually make their bodies spiritual. Just like someone exchanging gold for paper money, the former convert that which is immortal into that which is mortal. The latter are like someone exchanging paper money for pure gold-for they do not destroy that which is immortal, but convert that which is mortal into that which is immortal. The Jews interpreted the Law and the Prophets according to the flesh, and that is why they did not understand the Lord Jesus, but crucified the Lord of Glory. Those who were enlightened by the grace of the Spirit of God interpreted both the Law and the Prophets spiritually, and understood our Lord Jesus Christ. And through Him, they understood not only the Law and the Prophets, but all of created nature as well, and all of their life on earth. Brethren, although the body is necessarily born of the flesh, it would be unnatural for the spirit also to be born of the flesh. Let our spirit be born of the Spirit of God and then we will be natural, both in body and in spirit. This is that higher and sinless nature that Adam had in Paradise before he sinned. It is not possible or necessary for our body to be born again of the flesh. It is possible and necessary, and never too late, for our spirit to be born again of the Spirit of God.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God-help us, that before death we may become reborn of the Spirit of God, and that our spirits, in truth, be born of the Spirit.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR SOZON

Sozon was born in Lyconia. He was a shepherd and kept all of God's laws, instructing his peers and friends in his pious Faith. In a vision he was shown that he would suffer martyrdom for Christ. This was in the time of Maximian, magistrate of Cilicia, who perpetrated a terrible persecution of Christians in the nearby city of Pompeiopolis. In that city there was a certain golden idol which the pagans worshiped. Sozon left his flock, went to the city, entered the pagan temple and broke the arm off the golden idol. He crumbled it into bits and distributed it to the poor. There was a great uproar because of this, and the pagans sought out the guilty one. So that no one else would suffer for his deed, Sozon went to the magistrate and declared himself to be a Christian and the perpetrator of that act. His torturers first beat him, then suspended him from a tree and scraped his body with iron combs. When he was nearly dead, they cast him into a fire, where St. Sozon gave up his holy soul to God. He suffered in about the year 304. St. Sozon's relics were miracle-working, and a church in his name was built over them.

2. THE HOLY APOSTLES EUODUS AND ONESIPHORUS

Euodus and Onesiphorus were apostles of the Seventy. St Ignatius the God-bearer mentions Euodus with great praise in his Epistle to the Antiochians. Euodus was a disciple of the Apostle Peter, and his successor as Bishop of Antioch. The Apostle Peter himself consecrated him. Euodus wrote a work on the Holy Theotokos, in which he related how the Holy Virgin Mary was brought to the Temple at the age of three, and remained in the Temple for eleven years; how, on entering her fifteenth year, she was entrusted to St. Joseph for protection; and how, at age fifteen, she gave birth to the Lord. Euodus also wrote another work entitled "The Beacon." However, both of these works were destroyed during the persecution of Christians. He was slain for Christ during Emperor Vespasian's persecutions in Antioch. The Apostle Paul mentions St. Onesiphorus as his sincere friend and helper (**II Timothy 1:16-18**). St. Onesiphorus suffered for Christ in Colophon, where he was bishop. It is said that he was tied to wild horses and pulled apart. Thus, these faithful soldiers of Christ honorably served on earth, and entered into the joy of their Lord.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR EUPSYCHIUS

Eupsychius was the son of Dionysius, a senator. He was severely tortured for Christ, being beaten and scraped, and was thrown half-dead into prison, where an angel of God came to him and healed him. Released from prison, he distributed all of his possessions-some to the poor and some to his slanderers. He was arrested again, and his body was scraped until he gave up his soul to God. Instead of blood, milk and water flowed from his wounds. He suffered in the time of Emperor Hadrian.

4. SAINT JOHN, ARCHBISHOP OF NOVGOROD

John was a priest who was ordained Bishop of Novgorod in 1163. He built seven churches during his lifetime. He had a vision of the Holy Theotokos, and had unusual power over demons, whom he even forced to serve him. He miraculously saved Novgorod from an attack by seventy-two princes. He suffered from diabolical temptations, but by the power of the Cross and much prayer he overcame them all. In old age, he withdrew to a monastery and received the great schema. He reposed peacefully in the Lord on September 7, 1185.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR SOZON

The young Sozon, a right-believing hero,
Stood erect before the unbelievers-
He stood straight, fearing nothing,
Holding his mind immersed in God,
Standing with his mind firm in heaven.
The tormentor subjected him to torture
For breaking the arm of the golden idol.
"I broke it," Sozon replied,
"To see if it would rebuke me,
But the idol's two arms are lifeless.
In vain do you offer sacrifices.
The lifeless idol said not a word to me,
And had no power to keep me from breaking its arm.
This dead thing was mute, as it has no spirit in it,
Nor understanding, nor sight, nor hearing.
I took the arm, not for theft
But to distribute bread to the poor.
O pagans, it was for your salvation
That I distributed this dead stone,
To bring some light into your souls,
That you might recognize the Living Christ as God."
Sozon knelt, and prayed to God,
And shed his blood for truth.
Sozon, the wonderful, unsurpassable hero,
Whose limitless source of strength was God.

REFLECTION

Victory over anger is one of the greatest victories of a soldier of Christ. We generally become angry either at those we wish to turn back from sin, or at those who slander us. However, in doing so we forget that anger is a mortal sin, and in desiring the salvation of others we lose our own, according to the words of St. Macarius. Anger against our enemies is usually tied to another evil impulse, the desire for revenge. St. Eupychius so overcame the passion of anger in himself, that before his death, he gave one portion of his great estate to the poor and another portion to his slanderers, because of whom he was being tortured and slain. He considered his slanderers as his benefactors. St. John Chrysostom writes: "Let us clip the wings of anger, and evil will not rise high. Anger is an evil sickness that can destroy our souls.... Anger is a terrible fire which devours everything.... If an angry man could see himself at the moment of his anger, he would need no other counsel not to become angry-because there is nothing more unpleasant than an angry face." Abba Ammon confessed of himself: "I spent fourteen years in Scetis, praying to God day and night, to give me victory over anger."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Solomon's honoring of his mother (I Kings 2):

1. How his mother went to her son to ask something of him;
2. How he stood up, met his mother and bowed before her-even though he was king;
3. How, when he sat down on his throne, he placed his mother at his right hand.

HOMILY

-on spiritual food-

My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me (John 4:34).

Behold, here is love! Behold, here is instruction! Behold, here is humility! Behold, here is an example! As there is in good bread all that is needed for our body, so in every word of the Lord Jesus Christ there is all that is needed for our soul. The divine unity of the nature of the Father and the Son is expressed in the love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father. He who loves, obeys. If you want to know how great your love for God is, measure your obedience to the will of God and you will know immediately. A lack of obedience is a sure sign of the lack of love. He who loves, fulfills the will of his beloved. The Son of God loves His Father so much that He regarded fulfilling the Father's will as the sweetest food. What is the will of the Father? The salvation of mankind. Our Lord, the Son of God, felt the insatiable hunger to fulfill the Father's will. When He saved someone, He felt as if nourished with the sweetest food. Do you see how exalted Christ's spirituality is? His disciples brought Him food from the city and urged Him: Master, eat! At that moment He was too occupied with His main work, the saving of human souls. There was the Samaritan woman, ready to embrace the teaching of salvation; there was the entire city of Sychar, already drawn to the Kingdom of God; and there was the great field ready for the harvest of salvation. For Christ this was food sweeter than all physical food and worldly sweetness. The body is a vehicle in which man, the king, rides. When the king performs his royal duty-ransoming his heirs from bondage-the vehicle must be put aside and not interfere in the work of the king. The king is so focused on saving his beloved heirs, that this mission is his food, drink, reward, sole satisfaction and dignity.

O my brethren, if you could know how much Christ the Lord hungers, even today, for our salvation! If we did, then we would give Him the food that He likes most! Who is a greater guest, closer relative, or more sincere friend than He? When we host far lesser guests, more distant relatives and less sincere friends, we give them the food that we know they like. Then, why do we not host our Lord with the only food that is pleasing to Him? Let us embrace the salvation that He offers us-that, for Him, is the most pleasant food. He turns His head away from all other food.

O Lord Jesus, insatiable Lover of our salvation, have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE NATIVITY OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS

The Holy Virgin Mary was born of aged parents, Joachim and Anna. Her father was of the lineage of David, and her mother of the lineage of Aaron. Thus, she was of royal birth by her father, and of priestly birth by her mother. In this, she foreshadowed Him Who would be born of her as King and High Priest. Her parents were quite old and had no children. Because of this they were ashamed before men and humble before God. In their humility they prayed to God with tears, to bring them joy in their old age by giving them a child, as He had once given joy to the aged Abraham and his wife Sarah by giving them Isaac. The Almighty and All-seeing God rewarded them with a joy that surpassed all their expectations and all their most beautiful dreams. For He gave them not just a daughter, but the Mother of God. He illumined them not only with temporal joy, but with eternal joy as well. God gave them just one daughter, and she would later give them just one grandson-but what a daughter and what a Grandson! Mary, Full of grace, Blessed among women, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Altar of the Living God, the Table of the Heavenly Bread, the Ark of God's Holiness, the Tree of the Sweetest Fruit, the Glory of the race of man, the Praise of womanhood, the Fount of virginity and purity-this was the daughter given by God to Joachim and Anna. She was born in Nazareth, and at the age of three, was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem. In her young womanhood she returned again to Nazareth, and shortly thereafter heard the Annunciation of the Holy Archangel Gabriel concerning the birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world, from her most-pure virgin body.

2. THE FEAST OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS OF KALISHKE

In the Monastery of the Holy Theotokos near the village of Kalishte, west of Struga in Macedonia, the Holy Mother of God manifested her power and mercy through numerous miracles. Many of the sick were miraculously healed, and thieves who thought to plunder or desecrate the monastery were severely punished by an invisible power. There is a miracle-working icon of the Holy Theotokos in the church there; nearby, there are two springs of healing water: that of St. Peter and that of St. Ananias. The Chapel of St. Athanasius is located in a cave not far from the main church.

3. THE FEAST OF THE ICON OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS OF POCHAEV

In the province of Volhynia there is a famous Monastery of the Holy Theotokos, in Pochaev. The Holy Mother of God first appeared in about 1340 to one of two monks who were laboring in asceticism in a cave there. From that time on, the place has been an inexhaustible font of numerous miracles.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE NATIVITY OF THE MOST-HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

O greatly desired and long awaited one,
O Virgin, thou hast been obtained from the Lord with tears!
A bodily temple of the Most-holy Spirit shalt thou become,
And shalt be called Mother of the Eternal Word.

The Burning Bush they called thee,
For thou wilt receive within thyself the divine fire:
Ablaze with fire but not consumed,
Thou shalt bear the Golden Fruit and offer it to the world.

Thou shalt be the Bearer of Him Who bears the heavens,
To Whom all of heaven offers up praise!
The Miracle of miracles shall come to pass within thee,
For thou shalt bear heaven, thou who art ``more spacious than the heavens!''

Thou art more precious to us, O Virgin, than precious stones,
For thou art the source of salvation for mankind.
For this, may the entire universe glorify thee,
O Most-holy Virgin, O white Turtledove!

The King of Heaven shall desire to enter the world,
And shall pass through thee, O Beautiful Gate!
O Virgin, when thou dost become woman thou shalt bear Christ for us;
From thy body, the Sun shall blaze forth.

REFLECTION

St. Dionysius the Areopagite writes of the immeasurable joy, the outer and inner radiance, and the indescribable fragrance that he sensed in the presence of the Holy Theotokos when he visited her in Jerusalem. In his zeal, he says that if he had not known the One True God, he would have recognized her, the Holy Virgin Mary, as God. The Holy Virgin made such a powerful and unique impression on men during her earthly life-and she received an incomparably greater power and glory after her physical death when, by the will of God, she was exalted above the heavenly hosts. Her power comes from her ceaseless prayer for the faithful, for all those who turn to her for help. When St. John of Novgorod and his people prayed to her for help against a hostile army, he understood that she was simultaneously praying to the Lord with tears in their behalf, and Novgorod was miraculously saved. As she was compassionate toward her crucified Son, so the Holy Most-pure One is also compassionate toward all those in need, and who turn to her for help. It could be said that the entire earth is covered by the miracles of her mercy. Even today, there lives in Belgrade a café owner (C. J.), who was born in the village of Labunishte (Macedonia) outside Struga. His mother brought him blind to the Monastery of Kali to, where, after the priest prayed over him before the icon of the Holy Theotokos, he received his sight. The first monk at Pochaev saw a fiery pillar extending from earth to heaven, and in that flaming pillar he saw the Holy Theotokos. She was standing on a rock. On the spot where she stood, a spring of healing water sprang forth: even today, it heals many of the sick.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's wonderful gift to Solomon (I Kings 3):

1. How the Lord appeared to Solomon in Gibeon, and asked him his desire;
2. How Solomon asked for an **understanding heart**, in order to judge the people and recognize good and evil;
3. How God gave him that which he sought, as well as that which he did not seek.

HOMILY

-on the equality of the Son and the Father-

The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father do (John 5:19).

Brethren, how are we to understand these words? In the same way as some heretics understood them-that is, that the Son is lesser and weaker than the Father? In no way. The mouths that interpreted these words of the Lord this way spoke blasphemy. We must understand these words as our Holy Fathers understood them-that the Son is equal to the Father in all things; and that, because of their equality of will, love, and wisdom, the Son can do nothing contrary to the Father's will, or contrary to the love of the Father, or contrary to the wisdom of the Father. Thus, the Father cannot do anything contrary to the Son, and the Holy Spirit cannot do anything contrary to the Father or the Son. Everything that the Father wills and loves and thinks, is also willed, loved and thought by the Son and the Holy Spirit. Harmony unequaled; unity undivided; being inexpressible! Therefore, it is obvious that the Son can and will do nothing of Himself-nothing of His own accord, **nothing without harmony and unity with the power of the Father and the will of the Father. The Lord Himself further witnesses that this interpretation is true by His words: For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will (John 5:21).** Do you see the equality of will and power? That which the Father wills, the Son wills also; that which the Father can do, the Son can also do. Therefore, let no one separate Their Divinity, and thus bring down a curse upon himself. God cannot be divided, and one who tries to divide Divinity-and to lessen one Person and to exalt the other Person-cannot be saved.

O Most-holy Trinity our God, Three in Persons, and One in Essence- Life, Light and Love-look down upon us, and have mercy on us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINTS JOACHIM AND ANNA

St. Joachim was of the lineage of Judah and a descendant of King David. Anna was the daughter of Matthan the priest, from the lineage of Levi, as was Aaron the high priest. Matthan had three daughters: Mary, Sophia and Anna. Mary married, lived in Bethlehem and gave birth to Salome; Sophia married, also lived in Bethlehem, and gave birth to Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Forerunner; Anna married Joachim in Nazareth, and in old age gave birth to Mary, the Most-holy Theotokos. Joachim and Anna had lived together in marriage for fifty years, and yet had remained barren. They lived devoutly and quietly, and of all their income they spent one third on themselves, distributed one third to the poor and gave the other third to the Temple, and they were well provided for. Once when in their old age they came to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice to God, the high priest Issachar reprimanded Joachim, saying: ``You are not worthy that a gift be accepted from your hands, for you are childless." Others, who had children, pushed Joachim behind them as one unworthy. This greatly grieved these two aged souls and they returned home in great sorrow. Then the two of them fell down before God in prayer, that He work a miracle with them as He once had with Abraham and Sarah, and give them a child as a comfort in their old age. Then God sent His angel, who announced to them the birth of ``a daughter most-blessed, by whom all nations on earth will be blessed and through whom the salvation of the world will come." Anna straightway conceived, and in nine months gave birth to the Holy Virgin Mary. St. Joachim lived for eighty years and Anna lived for seventy-nine, at which time they reposed in the Lord.

2. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE THIRD ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

This Council met in Ephesus in 431 at the time of Emperor Theodosius the Younger. There were two hundred Holy Fathers present at this Council. This Council condemned Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, for his heretical teachings concerning the Most-holy Virgin Mary and the birth of the Lord. Nestorius did not want to call the Holy Virgin the Theotokos (Birth-giver of God), but rather the Christotokos (Birth-giver of Christ). The Holy Fathers condemned the teachings of Nestorius and confirmed that the Holy Virgin be called the Theotokos. Besides this, the Council confirmed the decisions of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils-especially as regarding the Nicaean-Constantinopolitan Creed, commanding that no one take from or add to the Creed.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR SEVERIAN

Severian was a nobleman from Sebaste. During the martyrdom of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (March 9), he visited them in prison, encouraging and ministering to them. After their glorious repose he too was arrested, beaten and tortured for Christ. Finally, he was hanged from a tree with a heavy stone around his neck and another dangling from his feet. Giving thanks to God for everything, Severian gave up his spirit. This was during the reign of Emperor Licinius, in the year 320.

4. SAINT THEOPHANES THE CONFESSOR AND FASTER

After a God-pleasing life and much suffering, Theophanes reposed peacefully in the year 299.

5. SAINT NICETAS THE GOD-PLEASER

Nicetas lived in Constantinople in the twelfth century. He so pleased God by his life that the church doors opened of themselves before him, and the icon lamps lit by themselves. Such was the power of his prayer. At the wish of Deacon Sozon, and by the prayer of Nicetas, a priest appeared from the other world, from whom Sozon had been estranged and had remained unreconciled. There first appeared a row of priests vested in white and then another row of priests in red vestments. Sozon recognized his former opponent among them, and made peace with him. This occurred at night, in the Blachernae Church.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS JOACHIM AND ANNA

Be glad, O barren one;
Be glad, O aged Anna.
You will conceive and give birth
To a wondrous child, a chosen one-

As once did the aged Sarah,
And the mother of Samson,
And the mother of Samuel,
And the mother of John-

Yet you will be more glorious than all,
For you will give birth from the womb
To the wonderful Virgin, the only
Wonderful Mother of the Most-high King.

Be glad, O Joachim,
Father of the unprecedented mother,
Of whom the Creator desires
To be clothed with glory.

The Law loses its power
When God wills, and where He wills.
Who can gainsay God?
Can there be any dispute with God?

Not by disputation, but by love
Does God change His laws.
Before love, all laws
Are as if nonexistent.

When men hunger, the Lord
Makes the dry field fertile;
And because of the spiritual hunger of the world,
He makes the barren one fertile.

For the salvation of men, the Lord
Arranges all for the best.
That is why all the Church of the saints
Cries out to Him: Glory! Glory!

REFLECTION

One should not give alms with pride but rather with humility, considering the one to whom the alms are given to be better than oneself. Did not the Lord Himself say: Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me (**Matthew 25:40**)? Theophanes the Confessor possessed a mind illumined by the light of Christ, even as a child. Once, while walking along the street, he saw a naked child freezing. He quickly removed his clothes, clothed the child and thus warmed him and brought him back to life. He then returned home naked. His startled parents asked him: ``Where are your clothes?" To this Theophanes replied: ``I clothed Christ." This is why he was given the grace of Christ, and was later a great ascetic, a sufferer for the Christian Faith and a miracle-worker. Often, when we give alms, either in someone else's name or in our own name, we cannot avoid pride which, as soon as it appears in the heart, destroys all the good deeds performed. When we give to the beggar as to a beggar and not as to Christ, we cannot avoid pride or disdain. What value is there in performing an act of mercy, while taking pride in ourselves and disdaining the man? Virtue is not a virtue when it is mixed with sin, just as milk is not milk when it is mixed with gasoline or vinegar.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wisdom of Solomon (**I Kings 3**):

1. How two women disputed over a child, and each said that the child was hers;
2. How Solomon ordered that the child be cut in two; and one half be given to each woman;
3. How the real mother cried out for the child, and thus made it known that the child was hers.

HOMILY

-On God's testimony of Himself-

**If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true
(John 5:31).**

This is how the Lord spoke to a false and lying people. He spoke these words to the elders of the Jews, not as an instruction, but rather as a reproach. They did not believe one man when he spoke for himself, but rather sought two witnesses. Brethren, do not even think that what the Lord says of Himself is not true-but rather, that the Jews did not consider it as true. From this, according to the interpretation of our Holy Fathers, the words My witness is not true must be understood to mean that this witness was not true in the eyes of the Jews. That every word that the Lord Jesus spoke about Himself is true He expressed in another place, saying: Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true (**John 8:14**). Here the Lord teaches, there He reproaches; here He confirms how a thing is; there, how the thing seemed to be to the Jews. The Jews did not believe His witness about Himself, but sought other witnesses. Therefore, He cited three great witnesses-the witness of His own works: The same works that I do, bear witness of Me (**John 5:36**); the witness of His Heavenly Father, Who bore witness to Him as His Son at the Jordan and on Mount Tabor: And the Father himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me (**John 5:37**); and finally, the witness of the Holy Scriptures: Search the scriptures ... they are they which testify of Me (**John 5:39**). With a bit of understanding, what other kind of witness would a man require? But the understanding of the Jewish elders was darkened to so great an extent that they were unable to see or understand anything. When the Lord, the Lover of Mankind, did all that was necessary to save the Jewish elders, and when they rejected all the witnesses about Him, thereby rejecting even their own salvation, He then said to them: Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true (**John 8:14**).

O my brethren, let us not be stony-hearted as were those blind elders, and let us not reject our only salvation. We do not seek any other witnesses, but rather believe that which the Lord Jesus alone says of Himself. He said of Himself, I am ... the Truth (**John 14:6**), and it is by this Truth that we are nourished and saved.

O Lord Jesus, the Living Truth, the Eternal Truth-do not withdraw from us, but enlighten us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS MENODORA, METRODORA AND NYMPHODORA

They were sisters by birth and grew up somewhere in Asian Bithynia. Reared in the spirit of Christianity, they withdrew from the city to the wilderness, wishing to elevate their minds to God and to free themselves of everything in this deceitful world, and to live this life in purity and virginity as true brides of Christ. They dedicated themselves to great labor, fasting and prayer, until God adorned them with the gift of miracle-working. When people began to bring the sick to them for healing, they became well known against their will. A certain governor, Fronton, heard of them and brought them to trial. Upon seeing them, the governor was amazed at the beauty of their faces. For, even though they were great fasters and their bodies were withered, their faces were radiant, illumined by inward peace and the grace of God. At first, the governor flattered them and promised to send them to the emperor, who would give them in marriage to his noblemen. But when he was convinced that all of his flattery and promises had no effect on these brides of Christ, he ordered that Menodora be tortured first, and her sisters thrown into prison. After cruel tortures, the governor cried out to Menodora, who was wounded and bloody: "Offer sacrifice to the gods!" To this the holy martyr replied: "Do you not see that I am offering my entire self as a sacrifice to my God?" When St. Menodora was slain by the tortures, the governor then brought out the remaining two sisters, and stood them by the dead body of Menodora. Pointing to the body of their sister, he counseled them to deny Christ. Since they remained steadfast, he slew them by harsh tortures. Just then, a thunderbolt struck from heaven, and killed the soulless Fronton and his servants. Christians honorably buried the bodies of these holy martyrs of God. They suffered between the years of 305 and 311, during the reign of Maximian Galerius, and found rest in the Kingdom of Christ.

2. SAINT PULCHERIA THE EMPRESS

She was the daughter of Emperor Arcadius. She vowed to remain a virgin for life, and, as a sign of this vow, she had an altar of gold and precious stones built in the cathedral church. She reigned with her brother, Theodosius the Younger. Pulcheria was a great zealot for the Orthodox Faith. At her insistence, the Third Ecumenical Council, which condemned the Nestorian heresy, was convened in Ephesus. She built the famous Church of the Holy Theotokos of Blachernae in Constantinople. Following the death of Theodosius, she married Marcian, the emperor-elect, but lived with him as with a brother. She discovered the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. She reposed in the Lord on September 10, 453, at the age of fifty-five.

3. SAINTS APOLLOS, LUCIUS AND CLEMENT

Apostles Apollos, Lucius, and Clement were numbered among the Seventy. Apollos (**Acts 18:24-25**) was bishop in Smyrna before St. Polycarp. St. Lucius (**Romans 16:21**) was bishop in Laodicea. St. Clement was bishop in Sardis.

4. THE THREE HOLY WOMEN

A noblewoman from Constantinople, with her two servants, despised the vanity of the world and withdrew to solitude where, after eleven years of asceticism, they rested in the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS MENODORA, METRODORA AND NYMPHODORA

Three virgins, sisters by birth,
Three glorious martyrs of Christ,
Glorified Christ before Fronton.
By their fearlessness, they frightened the governor;
And Governor Fronton, poor in wisdom,
Thought, as many others did,
That by force, fire and gallows
He would quickly change their Christian ways.
The governor thought: "All women are alike;
They will quickly change their faith!"
But the governor had deceived himself bitterly,
And was shamed by these Christian women.
Christ discriminates not between women and men-
His gives strength to all who serve Him:
The miraculous power of faith and hope,
The power of suffering, without bitter lamenting.
This power outlived the empire,
And was employed for thousands of years-
Employed but remained whole-
Everything is as weak as clay before it.
Menodora, and with her Metrodora,
And the youngest sister, Nymphodora,
Conquered the governor by God's might.
They gave their lives and glorified Christ;
They gave their lives, and remained alive.

REFLECTION

Examples of courage and patience displayed by martyred Christian women-thousands upon thousands of them-have shone with radiant glory on all the pages of the history of the Christian Church. However, as amazing as these examples of voluntary martyrs are, the examples of ascetics, known and unknown, are not a bit less amazing, for asceticism is nothing less than prolonged martyrdom. Paul, the Bishop of Monemvasia, has given to posterity an instructive example of women ascetics. While he was still a layman and a collector of the royal tax, it happened that he stayed in a certain monastery. Seeing ravens landing on the fruit trees, breaking off branches with fruit and carrying them away, Paul wondered at this, and followed them with the monks to see where they were taking the fruit. Going thus, they came upon an impassable forest. The ravens landed at the bottom, deposited the broken fruit branches, and quickly returned. Paul and the monks investigated, and discovered a cave in which three women ascetics were living. The oldest one related their life story to them: She was of noble birth, from Constantinople. When her husband died, another nobleman wanted to take her as his wife by force. However, she decided that after the death of her first husband she would spend the remainder of her life in chastity. Therefore she distributed her wealth to the poor and fled to this deserted place with two of her maidservants. They lived there for eleven years in fasting and prayer, seeing no one and seen by no one but God. God the Provider arranged for the birds to bring them fruit for nourishment. Then they asked the abbot to bring them Holy Communion. Three days after they had received Holy Communion, all three of these holy women reposed, and the monks honorably buried them.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the riches and glory of Solomon (**I Kings 5:5-10**):

1. How Solomon built a majestic Temple to God and then built cities and ships;
2. How the neighboring rulers were amazed at Solomon; how Hiram served him and the Queen of Sheba visited him;
3. How Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed as gloriously as a lily of the field.

HOMILY

-on how sinful men prefer to receive an evildoer rather than a doer of good-

I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive (John 5:43).

Who is this "other" who will come in his own name, and whom sinful men will prefer to receive rather than Christ the Lord? It is he who does not carry the cross and does not walk the narrow path; he who is not a lover of man but rather a hater of man; he who does not struggle against sin but rather struggles for sin; he who loves impurity and spreads impurity; he who is a soldier of eternal death and not of eternal life; he who flatters the godless and loves every passion and vice: he is Antichrist. He will come in his own name and not in the name of God, and all those who did not receive Christ will receive him. He will be more dear to them, for he will embrace all their crooked and sinful paths. He will be more dear to them than Christ, for alongside the difficult path of Christ he will build a path smooth as ice, over which men will easily slide, not thinking about the abyss to which it leads them. The Lord Jesus Christ came in the name of the eternal salvation of men, eternal life, eternal truth and eternal justice. Antichrist will come in his own name, that is, in the name of eternal destruction, death, falsehood and injustice. When the Antichrist comes among his own, his own will gladly receive him. In fact, all those for whom Christ is difficult will gladly receive Antichrist, for he and his path will appear easy to them. Only when it is too late will the foolish see that they were deceived, but there will be no salvation for them. When they begin to slide into eternal night, into the jaws of the fetid serpent, then it will be too late; repentance will not be accepted and there will be no salvation. The foolish banquet of earthly sinners and Antichrist will be over quickly, in the blink of an eye, and the house of impure joy will turn into a hopeless prison of remorse and misery. Then it will be too late.

O man-loving Lord, the only friend of man, Thee only do we know and recognize. Thee, only Thee, do we receive as our Savior and salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE THEODORA

Theodora was from Alexandria and the wife of a young man. Persuaded by a fortune-teller, she committed adultery with another man and immediately felt the bitter pangs of conscience. She cut her hair, dressed in men's clothing and entered the Monastery of Octodecatos, under the male name of Theodore. Her labor, fasting, vigilance, humbleness and tearful repentance amazed the entire brotherhood. When a promiscuous young woman slandered her, saying that Theodore had made her pregnant, Theodora did not want to justify herself, but considered this slander as a punishment from God for her earlier sin. Banished from the monastery, she spent seven years living in the forest and wilderness and, in addition, caring for the child of that promiscuous girl. She overcame all diabolical temptations: she refused to worship Satan, refused to accept food from the hands of a soldier, and refused to heed the pleas of her husband to return to him-for all of this was only a diabolical illusion, and as soon as Theodora made the sign of the Cross everything vanished as smoke. After seven years, the abbot received her back into the monastery, where she lived for two more years, and reposed in the Lord. Only then did the monks learn that she was a woman; an angel appeared to the abbot and explained everything to him. Her husband came to the burial, and then remained in the cell of his former wife until his repose. St. Theodora possessed much grace from God: she tamed wild beasts, healed infirmities, and brought forth water from a dry well. Thus, God glorified a true penitent, who with heroic patience repented nine years for just one sin. She reposed in the year 490.

2. SAINT PAPHNUTIUS THE CONFESSOR

Paphnutius was the Bishop of Taiski in the Egyptian Thebaid. He suffered greatly for the Orthodox Faith. The heretics gouged out one of his eyes and broke his left leg. He participated in the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea, 325], refuting the heresy of Arius with great vigor. Emperor Constantine greatly respected him, and often kissed him on his missing eye, gouged out for the truth of Orthodoxy. He stood decisively against the western representatives at the Council who proposed that secular priests be completely forbidden marriage. Paphnutius was chaste his entire life.

3. THE VENERABLE EUPHROSYNUS THE COOK

Euphrosynus was a simple man, but a man of God. He served as the cook in an Amorean monastery in the ninth century. One night, the spiritual father of this monastery saw himself in Paradise, and saw Euphrosynus there as well. Euphrosynus picked and gave him three apples from Paradise. When the spiritual father awoke, he saw three unusually beautiful and fragrant apples by his pillow. He quickly found Euphrosynus and asked him: "Where were you last night, brother?" "I was where you were, father," the blessed God-pleaser replied. The spiritual father then revealed the entire incident to the monks, and all recognized the sanctity and godliness of Euphrosynus. But Euphrosynus, fearing the praise of men, immediately fled the monastery and hid in the wilderness, where he spent the remainder of his life.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR IA

Ia was denounced by idolatrous priests and suffered for the Lord in Persia during the reign of Sapor II, in 363. According to tradition, the sun became dark at the time of her death, and all the air was filled with a wondrous fragrance. She is glorified by the Lord forever.

5. HOLY MARTYRS DIODORUS, DIDYMUS AND DIOMEDES

They were flogged for the sake of Christ in Laodicea, and gave their souls into the hands of their Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE THEODORA

Wretched Theodora was tangled in sin;
Glorious Theodora was forgiven her sin.
One sin she ransomed with a hundred virtues
And the eternal mercy of the Son of God.
She thrust from herself diabolical suggestions,
And meekly endured the slanders of men.
Her mind immersed in her Lord,
Her thoughts were freed from earthly dust.
To the end, she submitted to God's will,
And thus was worthy of God's Paradise.
St. Theodora, citizen of Paradise,
Now help us, O God-pleaser!
That we sinners also be delivered from sin
And live with you as inhabitants of Paradise.
You were given power, before and after death,
To destroy all the snares of the enemy.
Because of your love, God gave you power,
And even the demons fear your power.
Now you worship Christ with all the saints,
And protect us from bitter attacks.

REFLECTION

One must not hinder anyone on the path of perfect devotion and service to God. Many saintly women who wanted to flee from marriage and devote themselves to God were pursued and hindered in this by their husbands. These women were usually victorious in the end, remaining steadfast in their intention, and often awakened the consciences of their husbands by their example, and directed them on the path of salvation. St. Theodora, dressed in men's clothing, had to carefully hide from her husband, and she retreated to a men's monastery. However, there were prudent husbands who approved their wives' intentions, permitting their withdrawal from the world to devote their lives completely to God. King Frederick was betrothed to a Czech maiden, Agnes. But she never agreed to enter into marriage, and broke her betrothal, fleeing to a monastery. Then the prudent king said: ``Had she left me for a mortal man, I would have sought revenge; but I must not find myself insulted that she chose the Heavenly King in place of me."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Solomon's terrible turning away from God, and God's punishment (**I Kings 11**):

1. How, in his old age, Solomon was captivated by many women, turned away from God, and began to serve idols;
2. How God became enraged and gave the kingdom over to Solomon's servant;
3. How Solomon turned away from God, even though God had appeared to him twice, and even though he had endowed him with wisdom and great glory;
4. How even the greatest man can fall, if he does not watch over himself with the fear of God.

HOMILY

-on Christ as the Bread of life-

I am the Bread of life (John 6:35).

Who can give life, my brethren, other than the One who created it? Who, in truth, can the Bread of life be, other than our Creator? He created, He sustains, He nourishes and He gives life. If wheat nourishes the body, Christ nourishes the soul. If our body is sustained by earthly bread, our soul is nourished and lives by Christ. If our souls are nourished by some other food, and not by Christ, our souls decay and die, and do not live. Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life (**John 6:27**). So says the Lord in a previous statement. First, He examines the hunger of men and then offers bread to satisfy it. Indeed, He offers the hunger, and then bread, for men are confused with regard to hunger. They are hungry for something but do not know what. Even when satisfied with earthly food and even when overfilled, they feel a certain insatiable hunger. Although they see that the whole earth, and all the bread on earth, cannot satisfy this mysterious hunger, they rush after earthly food; they vie for the earth and only for the earth. The true hunger of men is the hunger for heaven, for eternal life, for God. The Lord Jesus first emphasizes that hunger, and then prepares the meal for its satisfaction. He Himself is that meal: I am the Bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger (**John 6:35**). They shall be satisfied, they shall rejoice, they shall be enlivened, they shall know God, and they shall know themselves. O my brethren, He will raise them from the dead! For constant feeding on the food which perishes, without immortal, spiritual food, gradually dulls the soul and finally renders it completely dead. Dead of what? Of hunger. The body is of the earth and is satisfied with earthly food, but the soul is of the breath of the Source of life Himself, and seeks food and drink from its one and only Source.

O Lord Jesus, Bread of eternal life, of true and imperishable life, sweetest Bread-nourish us with Thyself.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HIEROMARTYR AUTONOMUS

During Diocletian's persecution, Autonomus left Italy for Asian Bithynia, for a place called Soreoi. There, he converted many to Christianity, and built a church for them dedicated to the holy Archangel Michael. Autonomus lived in the home of a devout Christian, Cornelius, whom he first ordained as a presbyter, and then consecrated to the episcopacy. Not far from Soreoi there was a place called Limnae, inhabited entirely by pagans. St. Autonomus went to this place and soon enlightened many with the Gospel of Christ. This embittered the pagans, and one day they rushed into the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael in Soreoi during the divine service and slew Autonomus in the sanctuary, and killed many other Christians in the church. During the reign of the Emperor Constantine, Severian, a royal nobleman, built a church over the tomb of St. Autonomus. Two hundred years after his death, St. Autonomus appeared to a soldier named John. John exhumed the relics of the saint and found them to be completely incorrupt, and many who were sick received healing from Autonomus's relics. Thus, God glorifies the one who glorified Him while living in the flesh.

2. THE HIEROMARTYR CORONATUS, BISHOP OF ICONIUM

Coronatus was born in Nicomedia, in the village of Salate. He was already quite old when the persecution under Decius and Valerian began. Perinius, a torturer of Christians, came to Nicomedia and began a search for Christians. Many Christians left the city and hid, but their aged bishop did not want to leave. Instead, he presented himself to Perinius and declared himself to be a Christian. The torturer bound him completely, and ordered that he be dragged through the town until much blood flowed. Then, under the sword, Coronatus gave his holy soul to God.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR JULIAN WITH FORTY COMPANIONS

They all suffered in about the year 300. First they were tortured, and then beheaded. Before his death, Julian prayed to God in this manner: "To those who take of my dust, grant to them, O Lord, forgiveness of sins and the subduing of their passions; let no ravaging birds, or grasshoppers, or caterpillars, or any other death-carrying destruction attack their fields. And receive my spirit in peace."

4. THE VENERABLE DANIEL OF THASOS

Daniel was an ascetic, the founder of a great monastery and a contemporary of St. Ioannicius the Great. Daniel was present when Ioannicius visited the island of Thasos. The people there implored the celebrated Ioannicius to free them from snakes. The saint prayed to God and the snakes, in large number, rushed into the sea and drowned.

5. THE HOLY MARTYRS MACEDONIUS, TATIANUS AND THEODULUS

They all suffered for Christ the Lord at Myropolis in Phrygia, during the reign of Julian the Apostate. They were harshly tortured for destroying the statue of an idol, and were burned on an iron grid until they gave up their souls to God. While burning over the fire, these brave men cried out mockingly to their torturer, saying: "Wouldn't you like to try our meat to see if it is well cooked?" And also, like the glorious Archdeacon Lawrence, they said: "Turn us over onto the other side, for this side is done!" Witnessing the holy martyrs on the fire, the torturer was more perplexed and frightened than they were.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HIEROMARTYR AUTONOMUS

Autonomus, most glorious, feared no torture,
But, because of his mission, was not bound to stay.
Fleeing the wrath of cruel torturers
He sowed the seed of the Holy Gospel,
Baptizing in the name of Christ,
And working miracles in His name.
But when he completed his task, having pleased God,
When his hour tolled to enter eternity,
The persecutors raged into the temple
And slew the saint at the holy altar
While the saint was offering the Bloodless Sacrifice-
The Bloodless and the bloody, commingled!
O Saint Autonomus, servant of God-
To God's servant, even torture is befitting-
Save us from fear in the face of tortures,
And be the helper of our salvation,
That we not fear to endure all for the Cross,
To die gladly for Christ.
O wondrous healer of every disease,
Preserve us from demonic deceptions,
That we immerse our minds in the Most-high God,
That we become worthy of that eternal life
In which you now reign like a king,
And joyfully exult with the holy angels.

REFLECTION

What kind of bond should there be between man and God? An unbreakable and continual bond. "Adhere to God as a son adheres to his father," counseled St. Anthony. And St. Alonius said: "If a man is not set in his heart that there is no one else in the world but himself and God, he cannot find peace in his soul." The one God is enough, and more than enough, for all that the heart of man can desire. Without a single protest, Blessed Theodora received a stranger's child, given to her by slanderers, as if it were her own. Theodora raised this child with love, and reared it in the fear of God. Before her death, this is how she counseled the child: "What is more necessary for man than God and His divine love? He is our refuge, He is our treasure, He is our food and drink, He is our raiment and shelter, He is our health and strength, He is our happiness and joy, He is our hope and our trust. Strive then, my son, to gain Him. If you succeed in gaining the One God, it will be sufficient for you; you will rejoice more in Him than if you had gained the entire world." In saying this, St. Theodora did not speak from a book or from someone else's words, but on the basis of her own personal experience. She lived for seven years, driven out and scorned by all men, and during that time she learned by experience that God was everything to her, and that the One God was sufficient for all that the heart of man desires.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the division of Solomon's kingdom (**I Kings 11**):

1. How, because of Solomon's sins, the kingdom of Israel was divided;
2. How Jeroboam, the king's servant, became king over ten tribes; and Rehoboam, the king's son, became king over two tribes;
3. How, even today, it happens that the sins of the father bring down misfortune on the son; and the sins of the elders of the nation, on the people.

HOMILY

-On how the soul must feed on Christ in order to live-

He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me (John 6:57).

Thus speaks Christ the Lord, the Life and Source of life. A tree feeds on the earth, air and light. If a tree does not feed on the earth, the air and the light, will it be able to grow and live? What does an infant at its mother's breast feed on, except its mother? If it does not feed on its mother, will it grow and live? So it is that our soul will not grow or live, if it does not feed on Christ, the Living and Immortal One. The words here are not about life in general, by which nature lives, nor about the stunted life by which pagans live, but rather about the special, divine and eternal life-a life full and joyful. Only Christ gives this life to men, and it comes only to those who feed on Christ. Each man is as great as the food he feeds on, and each man is as alive as the food he feeds on. The words here are not about bodily food, for only man's body-not man's soul-is fed by bodily food. Men differ both in physical growth and physical life, but these differences are totally insignificant. However, the difference in spiritual growth and life among men is enormous. While some men, by the growth of their souls, barely raise themselves above the earth, others raise themselves to the heavens. The difference between Herod and John the Baptist is no less than the difference between a king and an angel. While the former drags his body and soul through the earth and wickedly defends his throne on earth, the latter stands his body on a rock in the wilderness, and is raised in soul to the heavens among the angels.

O my brethren, let us lift up our souls to the heavens, where Christ the Lord sits on the throne of eternal glory, and let us feed and nourish our soul and heart with Him, the pure and almighty Life. Only then will we be made worthy to be His fellow heirs in the Kingdom of Heaven.

O Lord Jesus, our true God, our sweet food and our man-loving Nourisher; cast us not away from Thy divine bosom, for we are weak and helpless. Nourish us with Thyself, O our merciful Nourisher.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

When the holy Empress Helena found the Cross of our Lord in Jerusalem, she stayed awhile in the Holy City, and built churches in Gethsemane and Bethlehem, and on the Mount of Olives, as well as other places prominent in the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. On Golgotha, where she found the Honorable Cross, she began the building of an enormous church. The church was designed to encompass the Place of the Skull, where the Lord was crucified, as well as the place where He was buried. The saintly empress wanted to include the place of His suffering and the place of His glory under the same roof. However, Helena reposed in the Lord before this majestic church was completed. By the time it was completed, Constantine was celebrating the thirtieth year of his reign. Thus, the consecration of the church and the emperor's jubilee were celebrated on the same day, September 13, 335. A local council of bishops was being held in Tyre at that time. These bishops, and many others, came to Jerusalem for the solemn consecration of the Church of the Resurrection of the Lord. It was then established that this day-a day of victory and triumph for the Church of Christ-be solemnly commemorated every year.

2. THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR CORNELIUS THE CENTURION

Cornelius was a Roman and an officer in Caesarea of Palestine. As the result of a heavenly revelation, the Apostle Peter baptized him (**Acts 10:1**). He was the first among the pagans to enter God's Church. Until then, some thought that the Church was only for the Jews and those who received the circumcision of the Jews. Having been baptized, Cornelius left everything and followed the apostle. Later, Peter consecrated him a bishop and sent him to the pagan town of Skep, where St. Cornelius endured much humiliation and torture for the sake of Christ. Even so, he destroyed the temple of Apollo there by the power of God, and baptized Prince Demetrius with 277 other pagans. Being forewarned by God of the day of his death, Cornelius summoned all the Christians together, counseled them, prayed to God for them, and peacefully presented himself to the Lord in honorable old age. In time, his grave site was neglected and forgotten, but the saint appeared to Silvanus the Bishop of Troas and revealed it to him, commanding that a church be built there. The bishop carried this out with the help of Eugenius, a wealthy citizen. Many miracles have been worked by the relics of St. Cornelius.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS MACROBIUS AND GORDIAN

They were from Paphlagonia. They began as imperial attendants, but when they declared themselves Christians, the emperor banished them to Scythia. There, they were thrown into a fire at a place called New Danube, in the year 320.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR KETEVAN

Ketevan was Queen of Kakheti [in Georgia]. She suffered as a Christian under Shah Abbas I, in the year 1624. By order of the Shah, a red-hot kettle was placed over her head. Her son Teimuraz, the King of Georgia, placed her relics beneath the altar of the church at Alaverdi in Georgia.

5. THE VENERABLE HIEROTHEUS

Hierotheus was born in the Peloponnese in the village of Kalamata. He labored in asceticism in the Monastery of Iveron on the Holy Mountain. He was distinguished by great secular learning and by strict monastic asceticism. He strove to fulfill this rule of St. Arsenius: "In the course of twenty-four hours, one hour of sleep is sufficient for a monk." Hierotheus entered into rest on the island of Varos in the year 1745. His relics are miracle-working. Of these relics, his head is preserved in the Monastery of Iveron. Upon touching his holy relics in Constantinople, a blind woman received her sight.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HIEROMARTYR CORNELIUS THE CENTURION

Wondrous Cornelius, pious in feeling
But plainly pagan-minded,
Pleased God by giving much alms.
God the Most High sent him a mighty angel.
An angel greeted him, and an apostle baptized him,
And thus he was numbered among the faithful.
The first pagan who joined the Church
Confessed Christ with his entire household.
But, for him, baptism alone was not enough;
He became an apostle with the apostle of God.
To help others, and to save them,
Cornelius took upon himself a most trying labor.
He astonished men with mighty miracles,
Baptized the prince and hundreds of men.
Having known the sweetness of Christ he left his home,
And for sweet Christ he was glorified in torture.
For labor and torture in this life,
He now reaps his reward in the Kingdom of Christ.
Holy Cornelius, now help us
By your prayers before the Eternal Judge.

REFLECTION

What happens to the persecutors of Christ's Church? Ask Saul, the persecutor of the Church, what happened to him. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (**Acts 9:5**), the Lord said to Saul; and Saul was baptized and became Paul. What happened to Herod, the first persecutor of Christians? What happened to Julian the Apostate? They died evil deaths and their efforts against Christ dispersed into nothing, like smoke. And so it was throughout all of history: some persecutors converted to Christianity and others died evil deaths; but always, the efforts of one or the other against Christianity are dispersed into nothing, like smoke. When he attacked Jerusalem, Emperor Hadrian sought revenge against the Jews and against the Christians, for he did not distinguish Christians from Jews. He dispersed the Jews throughout the world, and built an idolatrous temple on the spot where the Temple of Solomon had stood. He also renamed Jerusalem ``Aelia," after his own name [Aelius], and forbade that this city be called Jerusalem by anyone. He built a temple on Golgotha to the foul Venus, a temple to Zeus over the tomb of the Lord, and a temple to Adonis in Bethlehem. How sorrowful the Christians of that time must have felt, seeing their holy shrines mocked in such a manner. But what happened in the end? Emperor Hadrian died an evil death and, in the time of Empress Helena and Emperor Constantine, the pagan temples were torn down, and in their places beautiful Christian churches were built-and these are still standing, even today. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Oh, how desperate and hopeless is every struggle against Christ!

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the vanity of men's efforts in opposition to the will of God (**I Kings 12**):

1. How ten tribes broke away and took Solomon's servant as king;
2. How Rehoboam prepared an army to make war against Jeroboam;
3. How God held him back from war, saying through the prophet: **For this thing is of Me (I Kings 12:24).**

HOMILY

-on how the world hates the witness of its sin-

The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth (John 7:7).

Why does the world hate Christ the Lord? The Lord Himself immediately explained this: Because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil (**John 7:7**). Men do not hate anyone as much as a witness to their sin. Because of this, the greatest misdeeds of the world are committed at night, in darkness. But does God not see at night, in darkness? In truth, God sees, but the evildoers do not see God. And even if some of them believe somewhat in God, they think, because of their own insufficient enlightenment, that darkness is a curtain between men and God. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself clearly revealed that God is all-seeing, and that no darkness prevents His eyes from seeing. He Himself saw men at a distance, such as Nathaniel under the fig tree. He saw a donkey with its colt in another village. His sight was not impeded by spatial distance. He foresaw the denial of Peter, the betrayal of Judas, His own death and Resurrection, the destruction of Jerusalem, the eternity of His Church, the suffering of His followers, and the events at the end of time. His sight was not impeded by the distance of time. But what more is there to enumerate? And what is more hidden than the hearts of men? Is not the heart hidden by the thick curtain of the body? Are not the thoughts in the heart more hidden than the heart itself? Nevertheless, He penetrated the darkness of men's hearts and read their thoughts there: **Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? (Matthew 9:4)**. Brethren, it is no wonder that all those who thought or committed evil were afraid of such a witness. Is it a wonder, then, that the evildoers hated Him?

The world cannot hate you. Whom? All of you who participate in the evil of the world and who, because of your participation, dare not witness against the world. How can those who fear men witness against men? How can those who seek the glory of men bring the condemnation of men against themselves?

O my brethren, it is better for us if the world hates us, and Christ loves us-than if the whole world loves us and glorifies us, and Christ turns His face from us, saying: I know you not. If the world hates us, let us be comforted by the words of the Savior: **If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you (John 15:18)**.

O Blessed Lord, the Source of all blessings, strengthen our hearts, that we may not be frightened when the world hates us. Only bless and love us, O Good Savior.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER - 14 -

1. THE EXALTATION OF THE HONORABLE CROSS

Two events in connection with the Honorable Cross of Christ are commemorated on this day: first, the finding of the Honorable Cross on Golgotha and second, the return of the Honorable Cross from Persia to Jerusalem. Visiting the Holy Land, the holy Empress Helena decided to find the Honorable Cross of Christ. An old Jewish man named Judah was the only one who knew where the Cross was located, and, constrained by the empress, he revealed that the Cross was buried under the temple of Venus that Emperor Hadrian had built on Golgotha. The empress ordered that this idolatrous temple be razed and, having dug deep below it, found three crosses. While the empress pondered on how to recognize which of these was the Cross of Christ, a funeral procession passed by. Patriarch Macarius told them to place the crosses, one by one, on the dead man. When they placed the first and second cross on the dead man, the dead man lay unchanged. When they placed the third cross on him, the dead man came back to life. By this they knew that this was the Precious and Life-giving Cross of Christ. They then placed the Cross on a sick woman, and she became well. The patriarch elevated the Cross for all the people to see, and the people sang with tears: "Lord, have mercy!" Empress Helena had a silver case made and set the Honorable Cross in it. Later, the Persian Emperor Chozroes conquered Jerusalem, enslaved many people, and took the Lord's Cross to Persia. The Cross remained in Persia for fourteen years. In the year 628 the Greek Emperor Heraclius defeated Chozroes and, with much ceremony, returned the Cross to Jerusalem. As he entered the city Emperor Heraclius carried the Cross on his back, but suddenly was unable to take another step. Patriarch Zacharias saw an angel preventing the emperor from bearing the Cross on the same path that the Lord had walked barefoot and humiliated. The patriarch communicated this vision to the emperor. The emperor removed his raiment and, in ragged attire and barefoot, took up the Cross, carried it to Golgotha, and placed it in the Church of the Resurrection, to the joy and consolation of the whole Christian world.

2. SAINT PLACILLA, THE EMPRESS

Placilla was the wife of Emperor Theodosius the Great. In mind and deed, she was a true Christian. She was especially distinguished for helping the needy and the sick. When some people told her that this was not consistent with imperial dignity, she replied: "It becomes the imperial calling to assist with money; however, in my personal efforts concerning the poor, I give to Him who deigned to give me this calling." She rested peacefully in about the year 400.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR MACARIUS OF THESSALONICA

Macarius was a disciple of Patriarch Niphon when the latter was laboring in stillness at Vatopedi [on Mount Athos]. Macarius longed to be martyred for Christ the Lord, and begged St. Niphon for his blessing. The clairvoyant patriarch, seeing that this was the will of God, blessed his path to martyrdom. Macarius went to Thessalonica and, in a crowd of Turks, began to speak about Christ as the One True God. The Turks beat him and threw him into prison. When they brought him to trial, Macarius cried out to them: "Oh if you only knew the truth, and were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!" The Turks beheaded him in 1527. At that very moment, St. Niphon saw this in the spirit and told a monk of Macarius's death by martyrdom, saying: "Know this, my child, that today your brother Macarius died a martyr's death and is borne to heaven, celebrating and rejoicing in the Lord. May we, by his prayers, be made worthy of blessedness."

4. THE VENERABLE MARIA OF TARSUS

She lived a life of total debauchery. Two monks traveling through Tarsus stayed at the inn where Maria plied her trade. When she approached the monks, they rebuked her and pushed her aside as unclean. She suddenly repented, and vowed never to sin again. The monks took her to a convent, where Maria lived a life of asceticism until old age. She was made worthy of working miracles even during her lifetime.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HONORABLE CROSS

Save, O God, Thy people!
Save, O Lord-
By Thine Honorable Cross, Thou dost shine upon us,
By the Cross, Thou dost lead us!
The Cross is power and a sign;
The Cross is salvation.

Save, O God, the Patriarch
And the Assembly of Serbian Bishops;
Grant them strength to serve
Thine Honorable Cross!
The Cross is power and a sign;
The Cross is salvation.

Save, O God, all those
Who are in authority;
May the Most-holy Cross protect them
From dark destruction!
The Cross is power and a sign;
The Cross is salvation.

Save, O God, all people
Who pray to Thee.
By Thy Cross, may they quickly overcome
Every difficulty.
The Cross is power and a sign;
The Cross is salvation!

REFLECTION

Just as a candle is lighted from another candle, so also a good work is born from a good work. A patrician wanted to donate a gold cross to a church. He summoned a young but experienced goldsmith, gave him a great deal of gold that he weighed out, and told him to fashion whatever sort of cross he desired. The poor goldsmith, seeing what a large donation this patrician was making for the sake of his soul, became inflamed with love for God in his own heart, and decided that he would add his own ten pieces of gold to the amount of the patrician's gold. When the cross was completed, the patrician weighed it, and discovered that it was heavier than the gold that he had given to the young man. He immediately began to scold the young man as a thief, suspecting that he had taken some of the gold and replaced it with some other heavy metal. When the young man saw the patrician so angry, he confessed his deed. He said: "I added from my gold, as the widow gave two mites, in order to receive Christ's reward with you." Hearing this, the patrician's heart was touched, and he said to the honorable young man: "From this day, I take you as my son, and the heir of all my goods."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the transgression of Jeroboam and the punishment of God (**I Kings 12, 13**):

1. How Jeroboam cast two golden calves and ordered the people to worship them as gods;
2. How the prophet declared God's displeasure to Jeroboam, and miraculously broke the altar before the idols;
3. How Jeroboam raised his hand against the prophet, but his hand withered, and only after the prayers of the prophet was it made whole again.

HOMILY

-on the truthfulness of Christ's witness-

Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true (John 8:14).

The light witnesses truthfully when it witnesses to the existence of the sun, and it does not lie. In the same way, the Lord Jesus witnesses truthfully to all that He testifies. He descended among men as a heavenly witness, to affirm the existence of the Triune God, the existence of the angelic world and of men's souls, the love of God for men, God's providence toward men, the power of justice over injustice, the might of truth over falsehood, the blessed immortality of the righteous and the eternal torment of the sinners, the resurrection from the dead, the Judgment of God and many other things that men-under the veil of sin-only felt as a faint premonition, but did not know of or strongly believe in. Most of all, He witnessed that He is the Son of the Living God, equal to His Father in Essence, power and love, and equal to the Holy Spirit of God. For the Witness had to witness first to Himself, so that by His witnessing to other mysteries, He could be believed. From the point of view of a pure and immutable truth, every witness of Christ is true; but from the point of view of the darkened Jews, it was not true. For God, and the angels of God, and the righteous ones, and for eternity, and for all time-His witnessing is true, and that is why He also said: My record is true. But for the darkened minds of the hardened sinners, this witness is not true. That is why He said to the Jews earlier: If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true (**John 5:31**). In other words; "It is not true for you Jews, but in essence it is true in and of itself."

O Most-blessed Lord Jesus, Son of the Living God and our only Savior, deliver us from the weakness of a sinful mind, and the wickedness of a sinful heart. Illumine us with the light of Thy words, eternally true.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR NICETAS

Nicetas was a Goth by birth. He was a disciple of Theophilus, Bishop of the Goths, who participated in the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea 325]. When the Gothic prince Athenarik began to torture Christians, St. Nicetas stood before the prince and denounced him for his paganism and inhumanity. Subsequently harshly tortured, Nicetas confessed his faith in Christ even more strongly, and prayed to God with thanksgiving. His mind was unceasingly raised up to God, and on his breast under his robe he bore an icon of the Most-holy Theotokos with the Pre-eternal Christ Child standing and holding the Cross in His hands. St. Nicetas carried this icon because the Holy Theotokos had appeared to him and comforted him. Finally, the torturer threw the soldier of Christ into the fire, where the holy martyr breathed his last, but his body remained untouched by the fire. His companion Marianus took his body from the land of the Goths (Wallachia and Bessarabia) to the town of Mopsuestia, in Cilicia. There, he built a church dedicated to St. Nicetas, and placed the miracle-working relics of the martyr in it. Nicetas suffered and was glorified in the year 372.

2. THE VENERABLE PHILOTHEUS

Philotheus was from the village of Myrmix or Mravin in Asia Minor. His mother had the same name, but reversed-Theophila. Philotheus was a presbyter and a great miracle-worker during his lifetime. On one occasion, he changed water into wine and, on another occasion, he miraculously increased a quantity of bread. He reposed in the Lord in the tenth century, and his relics gushed myrrh.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR PORPHYRIUS

Porphyrius was born in Mimosa. At first, he made jests about Christians for the Emperor Julian the Apostate. Thus, on one occasion, while parodying the Christian Mystery of Baptism, he immersed himself in water, pronouncing the words: "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!" When he emerged from the water he cried out: "Now I am a Christian!" Everyone thought that this was just another jest, but he remained steadfast, ceased to mock Christianity, and finally suffered for Christ. Porphyrius was beheaded in the year 361, and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ.

4. THE HOLY MARTYRS THEODOTUS, ASCLEPIDOTE AND MAXIMUS

They were all noblemen by birth, from Trachis. They suffered for Christ in the village of Saltis near Philipopolis, between the year 305 and 311, and entered into the Heavenly Kingdom.

5. SAINT BESSARION THE WONDERWORKER, ARCHBISHOP OF LARISSA

Bessarion founded the Monastery of the Savior, in the Diocese of Larissa. He was glorified by his miracles, both during his life and after his death.

6. THE HOLY NEW MARTYR JOHN OF CRETE

John suffered for the Christian Faith at the hands of the Turks in Ephesus, in the year 1811.

7. SAINT JOSEPH, BISHOP OF ALAVERDI

Joseph was one of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers (May 7) who were sent to the Caucasus to preach the Gospel. St. Joseph peacefully reposed in the Lord in the year 570. His miracle-working relics repose in the cathedral church in Alaverdi.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR NICETAS

He is a true patriot who, among his own people,
Erects a true altar to the Living Lord.
Athenarik the Goth ruled by force,
And offered sacrifices to lifeless idols.
But holy Nicetas, the soldier of Christ God,
Was a preacher of eternal salvation.
He cast rays of the Eternal Light throughout the night,
Dispersing the idolatrous darkness that shrouded souls.
Holy Nicetas opposed the prince,
And his brave endurance amazed his people.
By the power of the Honorable Cross, he confounded the darkness
And filled all the people with the fear of God.
His blood was the rosy hue of the new dawn,
And his spirit was raised up to the heavenly courts.
In the terrible fire, Nicetas burned,
But, not even today, has he been consumed.
With the truth of Christ the Goths were baptized,
And they glorified Nicetas, their wonderful one.
O Saint Nicetas, voice of God's trumpet,
Courageous martyr, true patriot;
From the tents of the earth you have departed,
And you stand in the royal courts with the angels.
Pray for us, for the King listens to you,
That He grant our souls mercy.

REFLECTION

God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7). God either punishes the mockers in order to correct them or He converts them into that which they had mocked. Initially, St. Porphyrius was famous among the pagans as a mocker of Christianity. On one occasion, he was mocking the Christian Mystery of Baptism before Emperor Julian the Apostate and his retinue. But something totally unexpected happened. When Porphyrius immersed himself in the water and pronounced the words of baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, his spirit was suddenly changed, and he became a true Christian. Instead of mocking the Christian Faith, he began to denounce the emperor for his impure idolatry, for which he was tortured and beheaded. A similar thing happened to the comedian Gennesus, probably in Diocletian's time. This Gennesus parodied the Christian Divine Liturgy before a crowd of pagans, amusing them with his mockeries and witticisms. Suddenly, he changed, and cried out before the people: "I believe, and I desire to be baptized." At first, the spectators thought his words were a part of his farce, but he repeated his statement of faith in Christ. When Gennesus remained steadfast in his new faith, even when interrogated by the court and the emperor himself, he was tortured and slain. Thus, the mocker of Christ became a martyr for Christ.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's punishment on a disobedient prophet (**I Kings 13**):

1. How this prophet was commanded by God to abstain from eating or drinking anything in idolatrous Bethel;
2. How the prophet disobeyed God, and ate and drank;
3. How, upon returning, he was torn apart by a lion.

HOMILY

-on the twofold witness of the Son of God-

I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me (John 8:18).

It is written in the Law that two witnesses are needed in order to prove something. First of all, the Lord provided the unbelieving Jews with three great witnesses about Himself: the Father, His own works and Holy Scripture (**John 5:36-39**). Yet, even after His many miracles, and after His teachings were widely expounded, He told them that His own witness of Himself was true and sufficient (**John 8:14**). Finally, He again emphasized two witnesses to them—His and His Father's—in accordance with the letter of the Law, which required two witnesses. Thus the Lord seals the lips of the unbelievers in every way, and leaves them no outlet but the crime of murder, which is the last resort of those who refuse to be convinced of the truth, with no regard for reason or proof. In this last case especially, with the Lord's presentation of His and His Father's witness, He also wanted to show that He was a separate Person [hypostasis], and yet of one Essence with the Father. Therefore, He presents two witnesses: His own separate witness and the witness of God the Father. The following words confirm this: **If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also (John 8:19)**. Expressed here is the complete essential unity of the Father and the Son, and there remains not even the slightest doubt that the Lord was thinking of His essential equality with His Father. The words here are about the Divine Nature, and not the human nature. Whoever conceives of the Holy Trinity as three bodily beings deceives himself. Only the Son of God appeared in the flesh, for the sake of the salvation of the world. The Father and the Holy Spirit did not take on flesh. According to His Divine Nature, the Son, although in the flesh, remained equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He clothed Himself in human nature, and added His Divine Nature, out of love for mankind, so as to reveal Himself to men and save them.

O Holy Trinity, one in Essence and undivided, Who illumined and enlightened us through the Incarnate Word of God, sustain us to the end by Thy sanctity, Thy strength and Thine immortality, and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR EUPHEMIA

Euphemia was born in Chalcedon. Her father Philophronus, a senator, and her mother Theodorisia were devout Christians. Euphemia was a beautiful virgin in body and in soul. When the Proconsul Priscus held a feast and offered sacrifices to Ares in Chalcedon, forty-nine Christians avoided this foul sacrificial offering and hid themselves. However, they were discovered and brought before Priscus. Among them was St. Euphemia. When the arrogant Priscus asked them why they defied the imperial decree, they replied: "Both the emperor's and your command should be obeyed, if they are not contrary to the God of heaven; but if they are contrary to God, they should not only be disobeyed, but should also be opposed." For nineteen consecutive days, Priscus imposed various tortures on them. On the twentieth day he separated Euphemia from the others and began to flatter her for her beauty, attempting to win her over to idolatry. As his flattery was in vain, he ordered that the virgin be tortured again. First, they tortured her on the wheel, but an angel of God appeared to Euphemia and shattered the wheel. Then they threw her into a fiery furnace, but she was preserved by the power of God. Upon seeing this, two soldiers, Victor and Sosthenes, came to believe in Christ, for which they were thrown to the wild beasts, and thus gloriously ended their earthly lives. Euphemia was then thrown into a pit filled with water and every kind of poisonous vermin; but she made the sign of the Cross over the water and remained unharmed. She was finally thrown to the wild beasts and, with a prayer of thanksgiving to God, gave up her spirit. Her parents buried her body honorably. Euphemia suffered in the year 304 and entered into eternal joy. She is also commemorated on July 11.

2. THE VENERABLE DOROTHEUS

Dorotheus was an Egyptian hermit of the fourth century. He labored in asceticism for sixty full years in one cell in the Thebaid. He distinguished himself by an unusual love of labor and by miracle-working. During the day he built cells for the new monks, and at night he wove mats, never interrupting his prayer and psalmody.

3. SAINT CYPRIAN, METROPOLITAN OF KIEV

Cyprian was born in Trnovo, but lived as a Serb on Mount Athos. He especially occupied himself with translating and re-copying books. His patron was Philotheus, the Patriarch of Constantinople. When the patriarch came to know Cyprian on Mount Athos, he took him into his service, and eventually sent him to Kiev as metropolitan. As Metropolitan of Kiev he endured much grief and misfortune, but endured it all with kindness and patience, and by his fruitful labor greatly benefitted the Russian Church. He spent almost thirty years in his calling as metropolitan. Prior to his death, he wrote a farewell speech that was read over his grave. He entered into rest on September 16, 1406. His miracle-working relics repose in the Church of the Dormition in Moscow.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR LUDMILLA

Ludmilla was the grandmother of the Czech King Vatslav [Wenceslaus]. She was married to the Czech Prince Borivoy. By her zeal for the Christian Faith, she brought many out of paganism into the Church. Her daughter-in-law hated her, and had men strangle Ludmilla in her old age. Vatslav buried Ludmilla's body in the Church of St. George in Prague. Many miracles occurred over her relics. She suffered in Techino in the year 927. St. Vatslav, himself a great zealot for the Orthodox Faith, was slain by his brother Boleslav.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR EUPHEMIA

All-blessed Euphemia, the holy virgin,
Offered herself to God as a sacrificial lamb.
She neither gasped, nor sighed, nor sorrowed,
But gave warm thanks to God for her tortures.
Angels appeared to her in the flame,
And extinguished the embers with cool heavenly dew.
Oh, such is our Faith-invincible!
Oh, such is the love for God-unquenchable!
Euphemia, wise virgin, virgin of Christ,
Christ the Lord gave you the Kingdom for your suffering.
You have boldness before the Mother of God and Christ our God,
And help Their work by your holy prayers.
O Euphemia, pray for all sinners,
And convert them, O saintly one, to repentance.

REFLECTION

Often unexpected misfortune befalls us, and in vain we ask "why?" The Church of Christ alone knows how to explain the cause of every misfortune. The Church basically classifies misfortunes into two groups. Some misfortunes befall the sinner because of old, unrepented sins. Other misfortunes assault the righteous and serve, according to the words of St. John Chrysostom, "as a means of receiving a wreath, as was the case with Lazarus and Job." The Empress Eudocia secretly agreed with the Eutychian heresy, having heeded the counsel of the perfidious eunuch Chrysaphius. But misfortune unexpectedly befell her. One day her husband, Emperor Theodosius, brought her an apple of unusual size. The empress sent the apple to the ailing senator Paulinus and he, out of love for the emperor, sent this same apple to Emperor Theodosius. This gave the emperor reason to suspect an illicit relationship between his wife and the senator. The emperor asked his wife to show him the apple he had given her. The empress lied and said: "I ate it!" This made the emperor's suspicion even stronger, and he banished Eudocia to Palestine. In time Eudocia cured herself of heresy, and through the counsels of the great Palestinian spiritual fathers returned completely to Orthodoxy. The misfortune that befell the empress did not arise from an illicit relationship with Paulinus-in this, she was completely innocent-but because of her heretical disposition. A second but different case: When he was still a military commander, the future Emperor Marcian was traveling near Philipopolis and saw the corpse of a murdered man on the road. Out of pure compassion, he got off his horse and started to bury the corpse. Just then someone came by and saw him burying the corpse, and reported him to the court as a murderer. Marcian would have been punished by death, had God not shortly revealed the true murderer. This kind of misfortune falls into that second category-"for the receiving of a wreath." Shortly after this, General Marcian was chosen to be emperor.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's wondrous judgment with regard to men (**I Kings 14**):

1. How Jeroboam's son became ill and died, for the punishment of his apostate father and for his own salvation;
2. How the rest of Jeroboam's men perished, and were eaten by dogs in the city and by birds in the field.

HOMILY

-on the Lord, the holder of power-

I have power to lay it [My life] down and I have power to take it again (John 10:18).

The divine power of our Lord Jesus Christ manifested itself in His complete power over Himself. If divine power could be separated from divine love, then it could be said of Christ that He would have been able to incarnate, or not incarnate; or again, that He would have been able die, or not die. But, He became incarnate according to His divine love for men and, according to this same inexpressible love, He gave Himself up to death as a Good **Shepherd** for His sheep (**John 10:11**). A man who kills himself does not truly have power over his life, for he does not kill himself by his own power, but rather by the power of sin, or by the power of the devil, or by the power of some other grave circumstance. So also, a man whom others kill has no power over his life, nor can he speak for his life before his murderers: he cannot say **I have power to lay it down**, for he must lay it down unwillingly. Only our Lord Jesus Christ could say in the presence of his murderers, the Jews: **I have power to lay it down**. Having that power, He could, by a miracle that would have been easy for Him, have made all the Jews perish before they crucified Him on the Cross. Yet He foresaw the saving fruits of His death, and that is why He willingly gave Himself up to be slain. **And I have power to take it again**. With these words He foretold His Resurrection. Therefore, the Lord both died and resurrected by His divine power.

O Almighty and man-loving Lord, how beautifully Thou didst plan the salvation of men by Thy divine power and love. Help us, O help us, that we might embrace that salvation!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER -17-

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS VERA, NADA AND LYUBOV (FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE) AND THEIR MOTHER SOPHIA (WISDOM)

They all lived and suffered in Rome during the reign of Emperor Hadrian. Sophia was wise, as her name implies. She was left a widow, and had established herself and her daughters well in the Christian Faith. When the persecuting hand of Hadrian extended even over the virtuous home of Sophia, Vera was only twelve years old; Nada, ten years old; and Lyubov, nine years old. Brought before the emperor, these four held each other's hands "like a woven wreath," humbly but steadfastly confessed their faith in Christ the Lord and refused to offer sacrifices to the pagan idol Artemis. Before their suffering, the mother encouraged her daughters to endure to the end: "Your heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, is eternal health, inexpressible beauty and eternal life. When your bodies are slain by torture, He will clothe you in incorruption and the wounds on your bodies will shine in the heavens as stars." One by one the torturers inflicted cruel torments, first on Vera, then on Nada, and then on Lyubov. They beat them, slashed them, cast them into fire and boiling pitch, and finally beheaded them with the sword one after another. Sophia took the dead bodies of her daughters outside the town and honorably buried them. She remained at their grave for three days and three nights, praying to God. Then she gave her spirit to God, flying off to Paradise, where the blessed souls of her glorious daughters awaited her.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR AGATHOCLEIA

Agathocleia was a servant of a certain Nicholas and his wife Paulina, who had been Christians but turned back from the Faith to worship idols. Holy Agathocleia refused to follow the error of her masters and was subsequently tortured cruelly by them, and by the pagan judges. Her mistress killed her by pouring hot coals on her neck, but this handmaiden of God was glorified in His Heavenly Kingdom.

3. THE HOLY 156 MARTYRS OF EGYPT

They suffered for Christ the Lord in the year 310-some by sword and others by fire. Among them were two old bishops, Peleus and Nilus; a priest, Zeno; and two prominent men, Paternuthius and Elias. Bishop Silvanus and John, an eminent, blind elder (who knew the Holy Scriptures by heart and recited them at the gatherings of Christians), were also with them. All were crowned with martyr's wreaths and took up their habitation in the Eternal Kingdom of Christ.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR THEODOTA

Theodota endured eight years of cruel torture for Christ. Her torturer was the eparch Simplicius, who later went insane. Theodota was beheaded in about the year 230, during the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS VERA, NADA AND LYUBOV, AND THEIR MOTHER, SOPHIA

Sophia, all-wise, glorified the Lord;
As a sacrifice to Him, she offered three most-beautiful daughters.
To her daughters she said: "Be not afraid, my daughters;
Strengthen yourselves in Christ; endure in the Faith;
And be not afraid of torture or bitter misfortunes.
Do not grieve over your bodies-it is better in heaven:
God will give you wonderful bodies in heaven.
Do not grieve over your beauty-with divine beauty
You will shine among the angels in the Kingdom of God,
As the daughters of the King of kings!
Do not grieve over life-what is this earthly life worth?
Its span is at most a hundred years.
In heaven, life without end awaits you:
Life without end, life without beginning.
Do not grieve for the company of earthly friends,
For the company of wonderful saints awaits you there.
Nor should the company of worldly kinsmen cause you grief-
For your kin in the heavens are the glorious martyrs."
Thus the saintly mother instructed her holy daughters,
As, one by one, they flew off to heaven:
Three white doves, innocent and pure,
Flew swiftly to the bosom of Christ.
And with her soul uplifted, their mother flew after them,
And joined her glorious daughters in Paradise;
And our merciful God receives their prayers.

REFLECTION

A faithful and God-fearing ruler is a true blessing for all people. King Vatslav of the Czechs was such a ruler. His zeal for the sanctity of the Faith and his steadfastness remind us of the ancient ascetics. During the day he devoted himself to the affairs of the state, and at night to prayer. In winter, he often walked barefoot to the church for Matins with his old servant Podivoi. He often prepared and baked prosphora himself, especially when he desired to receive Holy Communion. Because of his care for the Faith, many churches were built, in which daily services to God were celebrated. He especially concerned himself with the poor and needy. He was a lover of peace, yet also a great and fearless hero. When the neighboring Prince Radislav attacked the Czech lands, Vatslav sent him a letter asking why he was waging war. The proud Radislav replied that he wanted Vatslav to cede all the Czech lands, and his throne, to him. Vatslav promptly amassed a large army and confronted his enemy. Yet, pondering on the two powerful armies, he mourned that so many men would die, and sent a message to Radislav: "The quarrel is between you and me; you desire to rule the land of the Czechs and I will not yield. Agree to resolve this matter with a duel between the two of us. Why shed so much blood in a battle between two armies?" Prince Radislav agreed to this duel, and was defeated by Vatslav. On his knees, he begged him for forgiveness.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the transgressions of Judah, and God's punishment of those transgressions (**I Kings 14**):

1. How the people and King Rehoboam did that which is evil in the sight of the Lord;
2. How they erected idols in the temples, and how there were many sodomites in the land;
3. How the king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and plundered all the gold of the Temple.

HOMILY

-on the unity of Essence of the Father and the Son-

I and My Father are one (John 10:30).

The more miracles that the Lord Jesus performed, and the closer He came to His death, the more openly He spoke of Himself. The numerous miracles and the increasing length of time to contemplate them worked changes in both the good and the wicked. The good became receptive to the revelation of God's lofty mysteries. The wicked, clinging to evil, darkened themselves all the more, and became incapable of receiving these mysteries. That is why the wicked **took up stones ... to kill Him (John 10:31)**.

I and My Father are one. The Father and the Son are one in Essence, but are not one in Person (hypostasis). Otherwise, one could not call them by two names: Father and Son. Both the Son and the Holy Spirit have all the attributes of the Father's Essence. However, the attributes of the Person of the Father belong only to the Father, the attributes of the Person of the Son belong only to the Son and the attributes of the Person of the Holy Spirit belong only to the Holy Spirit. But when the discourse is about the Divine Essence, the Son can say, "**I and My Father are one**," and the Father can say, "I and the Son are one," and the Holy Spirit can say, "I and the Father and the Son are one."

The Lord Jesus Christ expressed the unity of His Being with the Father in the following words: **The Father is in Me and I in Him (John 10:38)**. Can the divinity of the Son be expressed more clearly? Can the human tongue convey the unity of the Triune God in stronger terms? The dogma of the divinity of the Son of God, as well as the dogma of the unity of the Being of God, was revealed and laid out by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore, let no one give credence to the deceits of certain unbelievers and heretics-who pretend that the Lord Jesus did not reveal His divinity, and allege that this dogma was introduced to the Church much later. If Christ had not proclaimed His divinity, why would the Jews have said to Him: **Thou... makest Thyself God (John 10:33)**? And why would they take up stones against Him?

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, one in Essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us and save us by the power and goodness of Thy divinity, almighty and all-righteous.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER - 18 -

1. SAINT EUMENIUS, BISHOP OF GORTYNA ON CRETE

From his youth, Eumenius wholeheartedly followed Christ, freeing himself of two heavy burdens: the burden of wealth and the burden of the flesh. He freed himself of the first burden by distributing his entire estate to the poor and needy, and the second burden by strict fasting. In this way he first healed himself, and then began to heal others. Passionless and filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, Eumenius shone with a light that could not be hidden. As it is written, **A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid (Matthew 5:14)**, so the holy Eumenius could not be hidden from the world. Witnessing his goodness, the people chose him as Bishop of Gortyna, and he governed the flock of Christ as a good shepherd. He was a father to the poor, wealth to the needy, consolation to the sorrowful, a healer of the sick and a most wonderful miracle-worker. By his prayers, he worked many miracles: he subdued a poisonous serpent, cast out demons and healed many of the sick-and he did this not only in his own town, but also in Rome and in the Thebaid. In a time of drought in the Thebaid, he obtained rain from God by prayer. There, in the Thebaid, his earthly life ended, and he took up his habitation in the eternal home of his Lord. He lived and labored in the seventh century.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ARIADNA

In the Phrygian town of Promisea, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, there lived a pagan nobleman named Tertullus. The maiden Ariadna was his slave and a Christian. On the day of his son's birth, Tertullus prepared a great sacrificial offering to the idols, but the pious Ariadna did not attend, remaining at home to pray to the true God. Her master was enraged at this and tried to coerce her to deny Christ and to worship idols. When Ariadna refused, he tormented her with beatings and other cruel tortures and cast her into prison. When he released her from prison, he drove her away from the house. Soon afterward he regretted having released her, and sent servants to seize her and return her to him. By then, Ariadna was already a great distance from the town. She was passing by a huge rock when she saw her pursuers, and she prayed to God and the rock opened and hid her. The servants became confused by this and began to quarrel and fight among themselves, and killed each other.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR BIDZINI, PRINCE OF GEORGIA

Bidzini, and his kinsmen Elizbar and Shalva, died for the Christian Faith under Shah Abbas II, in the year 1661.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR ARIADNA

The fair maiden Ariadna,
Served her master honorably,
But served God more than man.
A slave in body but not in soul,
She did not desire spiritual slavery
And would not worship idols.
She would bow before God the Creator,
She would bow before Christ the Savior,
But she would not bow before the idols.
She was tortured for her Lord,
And accepted torture with great joy,
With joy and thanksgiving.
Merciful God, with His All-seeing eye,
Saw St. Ariadna's holy suffering,
And commanded the lifeless rock
To hide His suffering virgin,
As had once happened with Thecla and John.
Ariadna, all-blessed virgin,
Help us by your prayers
Before the throne of the merciful God;
And, in the company of the Holy Mother of God,
Help us by your prayers.

REFLECTION

The Lord said: **Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me (Matthew 25:40).** Similar things happen in almsgiving and in Holy Communion. In Holy Communion we receive the Living Lord Christ Himself, in the form of bread and wine; in almsgiving we give to the Living Lord Christ Himself, in the form of the poor and needy. A certain man in Constantinople was unusually merciful. Walking along the streets of the city, he would press his gift into the hands of the poor and hurry onward, so he would not hear their gratitude or be recognized. When a friend of his asked how he had become so merciful, he replied: "Once in church I heard a priest say that whoever gives to the poor, gives into the hands of Christ Himself. I didn't believe it, for I thought, 'How can this be, when Christ is in heaven?' However, I was on my way home one day and I saw a poor man begging, and the face of Christ shone above his head! Just then a passerby gave the beggar a piece of bread, and I saw the Lord extend His hand, take the bread, and bless the donor. From then on, I have always seen Christ's face shining above the beggars. Therefore, with great fear I perform as much charity as I can."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness of King Asa, and God's reward (**I Kings 15**):

1. How Asa did that which is good in the sight of God, and cleansed the land of idols;
2. How God granted him the victory over the Ethiopians, and blessed him and the people with every good.

HOMILY

-on the resurrected and Living Lord Who is the Resurrection and the Life-

I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25).

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke these holy words. Not only did He speak them, but also proved them by His actions. By raising Jairus's daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and His friend Lazarus, He proved that He is **the Resurrection and the life**, the Resurrector and Life-giver. Even so, He proved this best by His own Resurrection from the dead. For, to be alive and then to help the dead-this is something that has been heard of. But to be dead and buried, and lie in the grave for three days and to give yourself life-that was unheard of until Christ's Resurrection. It is the miracle of miracles, and the proof of a power above every other power. This miracle was performed by our Lord. Our Lord manifested this power. Therefore, true are His words, **I am the Resurrection and the life**, true and holy, and comforting to all of us who are traveling toward the inescapable death of the body, and who hope to live beyond the grave and see our Living Lord in glory.

However, our Lord is not only the Resurrector of the body, but also the Resurrector of the soul. During His life on earth, He resurrected only a few human bodies, but countless souls-to demonstrate that the resurrection of the soul is much more important than the resurrection of the body. Almost all human souls were dead when He came into the world, and He resurrected countless souls by His power, and imbued them with His life. Both the Jews and the pagans were dead in soul, and He enlivened the one and the other. My brethren, let us lay aside all concern for the resurrection of our bodies, and let us strive, while we still have time, for the resurrection of our souls. For if our souls do not resurrect, and are not enlivened by Christ while still on earth, let us not expect any joy from the resurrection of our bodies on the Day of Judgment, the Day of Wrath. For then the bodies of our dead souls would rise, not unto life, but unto eternal torment.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our only Resurrection and life, help us by Thy power and Thy mercy, that we may be resurrected and enlivened by Thee, unto salvation and eternal life.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

SEPTEMBER - 19 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS TROPHIMUS, SABBATIUS AND DORYMEDON

In the third century, during the reign of Emperor Probus, when Atticus was governing Antioch, two Christians, Trophimus and Sabbatius, both eminent and honorable citizens, came to that city. They arrived just as a pagan festival and sacrificial offerings to the idol of Apollo were taking place at nearby Daphne. Atticus made every effort to ensure that all citizens took part in this festivity. When someone noticed that Trophimus and Sabbatius were not participating in the festivity, he told Atticus. Atticus brought them to trial, and when they refused to renounce Christ he subjected them to tortures, one after the other. After he beat and tortured Trophimus, Atticus sent him to Phrygia to Dionysius, an even crueller torturer of Christians. Then Atticus took Sabbatius from prison and began to try him. When the torturer asked Sabbatius who he was and what his rank was, he replied: "My rank and dignity and homeland and glory and wealth is Christ, the Son of God, Who lives forever, and by Whose providence the universe exists and is governed." For that, he was beaten and torn and scraped with an iron implement until the bones showed through beneath his flesh. Under these tortures he reposed. In Phrygia, the torturer Dionysius subjected Trophimus to great torture, then kept him in prison for even greater tortures. A certain senator Dorymedon, a secret Christian, came to the prison and ministered to Trophimus. When the torturer learned of this, he began to torture both of them in the same way, and finally threw them to the wild beasts, but the wild beasts did not touch them. Holy Dorymedon even shouted at the she-bear, pulling her ears so that she would tear him apart, but in spite of all that, the bear became gentler. In the end, the torturer ordered that Saints Trophimus and Dorymedon be beheaded with the sword. The souls of both of these holy martyrs now reign in heaven.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ZOSIMAS THE HERMIT

Dometian, a Sicilian prince, went hunting in the mountains with his servants. There he saw an old man surrounded by wild beasts as tame as lambs. Asked who and what he was, the elder replied that his name was Zosimas, that he was a Christian, and that he had lived long among the wild beasts, who were better than those who lived in the city and tortured Christians. This offended Dometian, who was himself a cruel persecutor of Christians. He chained Zosimas and sent him ahead to Nazareth, as he especially wanted to torture him there, to intimidate those who believed in Christ. When Dometian had wounded and bloodied Zosimas with blows, he tied a stone around his neck and suspended him from a tree. Then the prince mocked him, saying: "Command that a wild beast come forth so that we may all believe!" The holy martyr prayed to God, and, indeed, an enormous lion appeared, drew near to Zosimas, and placed his head under the stone to alleviate the martyr's suffering. In great fear, the prince freed Zosimas, but the latter soon rendered his spirit into the hands of his Lord.

3. SAINT THEODORE, PRINCE OF YAROSLAVL

Theodore was a righteous and merciful man. He received the great schema before his repose, and entered into rest in the year 1298.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR ZOSIMAS THE HERMIT

To the arid wilderness, far from men,
Early in life, St. Zosimas had fled.
In solitude he conversed with God,
And spent his life in many labors-
In prayer, fasting, all-night vigils,
And in salvific contemplation of God.
He was like an angel in vigil, like a giant in faith.
Even the beasts sensed his innocence.
The beasts, despisers of cruel men, loved the saint,
And obeyed him as children obey their father.
The merciful saint tamed them with mercy,
And the beasts responded with goodness to goodness,
Since beasts remember goodness, and repay it in kind,
With gratitude to their benefactors.
Persecuted by men, but dear to the beasts,
Among the beasts Zosimas took up his habitation.
But the beastly men discovered his home
And killed his body by cruel torture.
Now St. Zosimas rejoices in heaven;
In Paradise, he exults with the saints.
He prays for us, that we may overcome our hardships
And rejoice with him in Paradise.

REFLECTION

Even the dead sense and know the good deeds that are performed for them. Christians need not have any doubt in this. A good deed spreads through the heavenly world like an electrical current. An imperial clerk, Magistrian, was sent by the emperor on an important errand. Along the way, Magistrian saw a poor dead man, completely naked. He was moved with pity, removed his shirt, dressed the dead man, and buried him honorably. After a while, Magistrian had an unfortunate accident: he fell from his horse and broke his leg, and lay sick in bed for a long time. On one occasion, several doctors gathered around him to take counsel concerning his illness. The doctors agreed that his leg would have to be amputated. That night Magistrian could not sleep, but grieved and wept. At midnight a man suddenly appeared in his room and asked him: "Why are you weeping?" When Magistrian explained his condition, the unknown man then rubbed the infected leg with his hand and the leg was healed. "For God's sake, tell me-who are you?" asked Magistrian. The unknown man replied: "Look at me, and see, is not this your shirt? I am he whom you saw naked and dead, and whom you dressed in this shirt. And behold, for your good deed God has sent me to heal you. Give thanks to God!"

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sin of King Asa, and God's punishment on him (**II Chronicles 16**):

1. How Asa, frightened of a neighboring king, took God's gold out of the Temple in order to buy an alliance with the King of Syria;
2. How the Syrian king took the gold, but betrayed him;
3. How God allowed a grave illness to befall Asa.

HOMILY

-on the sorrow of Christ-

**Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say?
Father, save Me from this hour? But for this cause
came I unto this hour (John 12:27).**

Nothing more real came into this earthly world than the Lord Jesus Christ-nothing more real as God, and nothing more real as man. In truth, besides Jesus Christ, this whole world is like a mirage. Neither earth, nor water, nor air, nor light even comes close to His reality. Behold, all of this will pass, but He will remain. Indeed, He is the cornerstone of the eternal, intransitory world; and only He, and those who cling to Him, will have a part in that eternal, intransitory reality. The stormy but helpless waves of time have furiously assaulted, and continue assaulting, the reality of Christ's divinity and even His humanity. As much effort was needed for Christians to open the eyes of the pagans and to prove the divinity of Christ, as was needed to open the eyes of the heretics to prove His humanity. The omniscient Holy Spirit foresaw this, and, through the Evangelists, prepared the weapons for Christian warriors. **Now is My soul troubled.** Would the Lord feel sorrow if He were not a true man, subject to all the weaknesses of the physical nature except sin? And He would feel not only sorrow, but also fear: **Father, save Me from this hour!** This is said by weak human nature which fears death (for this is about death). However, His human nature was not sinful, but sinless, for our Lord immediately adds: **But for this cause came I unto this hour.** Do you see how important the death of Christ is? By it we are redeemed, and by it we are saved. Therefore, let no one stop at the teachings of Christ; rather, let him take himself to Golgotha, and observe with horror the bloody sacrifice on the Cross that was offered for our sins-for our salvation from the foul jaws of the serpent of the netherworld.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who suffered for our sake and for the sake of our salvation-have mercy on us, again and again.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR EUSTATHIUS (PLACIDAS)

Eustathius was a great Roman general during the reigns of Emperors Titus and Trajan. Though he was a pagan, Placidus (for that was his pagan name) was a just and merciful man, similar to Cornelius the Centurion, who was baptized by the Apostle Peter (**Acts 10**). Out hunting one day, he pursued a stag. By God's providence, a cross appeared between the antlers of the stag and the voice of the Lord came to Placidus, directing him to go to a Christian priest and become baptized. Placidus was baptized, along with his wife and two sons. At baptism, he received the name Eustathius; his wife, Theopiste ("faithful to God"); and his sons, Agapitus and Theopistus. After his baptism, he returned to the place where he had experienced the revelation of the stag and, kneeling, gave thanks to God that He had brought him to the truth. Just then, the voice of the Lord again manifested itself to him, foretold that he would suffer for His name, and strengthened him. Then Eustathius secretly left Rome with his family, intending to hide among the simple people and serve God in humble and unknown surroundings. Arriving in Egypt, he was immediately beset by trials. An evil barbarian abducted his wife, and both of his sons were seized by wild beasts and carried away. However, the barbarian soon lost his life, and the children were saved from the wild beasts by shepherds. Eustathius settled in the Egyptian village of Vadisis and lived there for fifteen years as a hired laborer. Then barbarians attacked the Roman Empire, and Emperor Trajan grieved that he did not have the brave General Placidus, who had carried the victory whenever he fought. The emperor sent two of his officers to seek the great commander throughout the empire. By God's providence, these officers (who were once companions of Eustathius), came to the village of Vadisis, found Eustathius and brought him back to the emperor. Eustathius amassed an army and defeated the barbarians. On the way back to Rome, Eustathius found his wife and both sons. Meanwhile, Emperor Trajan had died and Emperor Hadrian was on the throne. When Hadrian summoned General Eustathius to offer sacrifices to the gods, Eustathius declined, declaring himself a Christian. The emperor subjected him and his wife and sons to torture. They were thrown to the wild beasts, but this did them no harm. Then they were cast into a red-hot metal ox. On the third day their dead bodies were removed, but they were unharmed by the fire. Thus, this glorious commander rendered **unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's (Luke 20:25)**, and took up his habitation in the Eternal Kingdom of Christ our God.

2. SAINT MICHAEL THE PRINCE AND SAINT THEODORE THE BOYAR

Prince Michael of Chernigov visited the Tartar horde with Theodore, his Boyar, at the invitation of Khan Batu. Since they refused to follow the Tartar custom of passing through fire and worshipping idols before gaining audience with the king, they were beheaded. This occurred in the year 1244. Their relics, witnesses of their martyric death for Christ the Lord, repose in the Church of the Archangel in Moscow.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR HILARION

Hilarion was an Athonite monk. He willingly suffered for the Christian Faith at the hands of the Turks in Constantinople on September 20, 1804. His miracle-working relics repose in the Church of the Transfiguration on the island of Proti.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR EUSTATHIUS

Eustathius, a wonder among generals,
Gave his life for the Living Lord.
Authority and glory and royal honor
He discarded as refuse and chaff,
For the sake of Christ, the Immortal King,
For the sake of true eternal life.
When the voice of Jesus greeted him,
He was infused with ardent love
For Christ the All-glorious God-
The All-glorious Lover of Mankind.
That voice remained deep in his soul,
And the world could not drown it out;
And the radiant cross which the general saw,
Never left his soul.
The Cross gave him wondrous fearlessness.
The Cross saved him from the enemy's power,
And saved his spouse, faithful as a rock,
And his children, heroic and virtuous.
Eustathius gave his body over to the fire,
And his blessed spirit to the Lord.
O Eustathius, glorious martyr,
Invincible soldier of Christ,
Help and strengthen the Church of God
That the malicious demon not slander it.
Let the Church shine as a star,
And glorify her Sun, Christ.

REFLECTION

Suicide is a mortal sin and an act of defiance against the Holy Spirit, Who gives life. Suicide is a much greater sin than murder, since for the sin of murder a man can still repent; but for the sin of suicide there is no repentance. Here are two examples of overwhelming misfortune, in the face of which a fainthearted man would commit suicide, yet in which holy men of God showed themselves to be heroes.

St. Eustathius found himself in the following predicament: he left one of his sons on the bank of a river, while he carried the other son to the opposite bank and returned for the first son. Halfway back across the river, he saw that a lion had seized his son and carried him away. He looked at the other bank and saw a wolf seize the second son and carry him away. A fainthearted man in such a situation would have drowned himself in the water, and made an end to his life. Even though drowning in sorrow, Eustathius did not commit suicide, but with hope in God lived as a hireling for fifteen years. This patient man lived to see his two sons again. Thus, God rewarded his faith and patience.

As a young man, St. Hilarion was forced to become a Moslem, but his conscience began to torment him cruelly, and he had no peace at all. He returned to the Christian Faith, was tonsured a monk, and gave his body over to intense fasting and every difficult ascetic labor. Even so, his peace of soul did not return to him. A fainthearted man of little faith would have committed suicide. But Hilarion chose an incomparably better path. He went to Constantinople with his spiritual father Bessarion, and not only openly confessed the Christian Faith at the sultan's court, but even counseled him to go to Russia and be baptized. After being subjected to mockery and torture, this courageous young man was beheaded, and God glorified him both in heaven and on earth. Even today, his holy relics are miracle-working. But where is the glory of those who commit suicide? Where are their relics?

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness of King Jehoshaphat, and God's reward (**II Chronicles 17**):

1. How Jehoshaphat was zealous for God's truth, and how he destroyed the idols in his land;
2. How God granted him riches, glory, peace and victory over his enemies.

HOMILY

-on the only Way, Truth and Life-

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me (John 14:6).

Brethren, these words were not merely spoken, but were soaked with blood, confirmed by the Resurrection, instilled by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful, and proven again and again by the Church through ages and ages. Of all the treasures on earth, men love life the most-and they love life more than they do truth, even though there is no life without truth. Thus, the highest good is life, but truth is the foundation of life. He who loves life, must also love truth. But where is the way to truth? Our Lord says: **I am the Way**. He did not say: "I am a way," so that none would think there is another way to truth besides the Lord Jesus. And He is not only the Way, but also **the Truth and the Life**, so that none would think that there is some other truth and some other life besides the Lord Jesus. For this He was born as a man, to show men the way; for this He was crucified, to mark the way by His blood. **No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me**. This addresses those who deceive themselves by thinking that they can know God and acquire the Kingdom of God without the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord entirely cut off this false hope and desperate self-deception by these words. The apostle who heard and wrote these words in the Gospel, expressed them in his Epistle in this way: **Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father (I John 2:23)**.

O Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, Source of all blessings-truly Thou art for us the only Way, the only Light, the only Truth, the only Life and Life-giver. We acknowledge Thee before men and angels as our only God and Savior. Have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE QUADRATUS

Quadratus, one of the Seventy, was a disciple of the Great Apostles. He preached the Gospel in Athens and was at first bishop of Athens after St. Publius, and afterward bishop of Magnesia. Quadratus was highly educated in secular wisdom, and rich in the grace of the Holy Spirit. His biographer says of him: **He was as the morning star among the clouds (Sirach 50:6).** The clouds were the darkness of Hellenic paganism, without the light of piety. The Holy Apostle Quadratus, through the word of God, shone upon the Hellenes as a great light, illuminating the darkness, destroying the foul sacrifices, crushing the idols, and destroying the demonic temples by his prayer. However, darkness always hates the light, and the pagans hated holy Quadratus. First they stoned him, as once the Jews did St. Stephen. Then they threw him into prison and gave him no bread until he gave up his holy soul, and went to dwell in the Kingdom of Christ, his God.

St. Quadratus wrote an Apologia for Christianity and gave it to Emperor Hadrian. This Apologia had such an effect on the pagan emperor that he ordered that Christians not be persecuted without specific cause. St. Quadratus suffered in about the year 130. He is buried in the city of Magnesia, where he suffered.

2. THE HIEROMARTYRS HYPATIUS, BISHOP OF EPHESUS, AND ANDREW THE PRESBYTER

Both Hypatius and Andrew were born in Lycia, and were friends from childhood. When they matured, both of them dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to the service of God-Hypatius as a strict monk and ascetic, and Andrew as a priest among the people and a preacher of God's word. Because of their great virtues, Hypatius was consecrated bishop of Ephesus, and Andrew was ordained a presbyter. Both suffered martyrdom under the reign of the iconoclast Emperor Leo the Isaurian. After horrible tortures for holy Orthodoxy they were beheaded in 730, and passed from this transitory life to life eternal.

3. SAINT DIMITRI, BISHOP OF ROSTOV

St. Dimitri's life is celebrated on October 28, but today we commemorate the finding of his miracle-working relics in 1752.

4. THE SYNAXIS OF THE SAINTS OF THE MONASTERY OF THE KIEV CAVES

The blessed work of asceticism begun by the industrious and great God-pleaser Anthony grew throughout the centuries like a fruitful olive tree. The numerous saints who shone as stars in Anthony's Caves are each celebrated on their own day. Today, however, the whole assembly of them is commemorated together and called upon by the faithful for aid.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE QUADRATUS

St. Quadratus, like the morning star,
Shone forth the light of the Holy Gospel,
Shone forth rays through the thick darkness,
And grace upon empty hearts.
Quadratus dispelled the confusion of men's thoughts,
Illumining the forebodings in men's hearts,
Illumining them with the light of Christ,
And enlightening the world with Christ's wisdom.
Unbelievers converted to the Most-high God,
And received cruel wounds for Christ.
To Hadrian, the persecutor of the Cross,
Quadratus wrote a great defense
With the eloquence and the skill of the Hellenes
And the simplicity of Christian truth.
Quadratus succeeded: the emperor was persuaded
To protect the Holy Church from evil.
O Quadratus, Christ's disciple,
Wise defender of the Holy Church,
In word and deed, you were God's servant-
With unfading glory, you are now crowned!
To you, we Christians pray fervently:
Help us, O holy Apostle!
Help us to overcome misfortunes,
And to endure all sufferings for Christ.

REFLECTION

If only we begin with the firm intention to live according to God's law, we need not be afraid of any assaults by unreasonable men. For he who truly begins to live according to God's law finds that all things done to him by men happen for his benefit, and to the glory of God. One especially need not fear being compelled to move from a place that he loves to a place that he doesn't care for. Instead of empty fear and fruitless lamentation, it is better to seek out God's intention for us. What harm did the evil actions of Joseph's brothers do to him? Did not his involuntary departure to Egypt glorify him, save his brothers from famine, and create the necessary conditions for all the wondrous things God worked through Moses in Egypt and in the wilderness? The pagans and heretics often drove Orthodox Christians into barbarian regions. What did they accomplish by that? Did they destroy Orthodoxy? No-rather, they strengthened it even more in the souls of the persecuted, and spread it among the barbarian peoples. The evil heretic Lucius exiled the glorious Macarius, with several Tabennisiot ascetics, from Egypt to a barbarian island, where the entire population worshiped idols. But by the teachings and example of these holy men, the entire populace of the island was soon baptized. That island was later renamed the "Island of Repentance."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's miraculous saving of Jerusalem because of the righteousness of Jehoshaphat (**II Chronicles 20**):

1. How a multitude of Moabites and Ammonites set off against Jerusalem;
2. How King Jehoshaphat prayed to God, and it was revealed to him through the prophet that **the battle is not yours, but God's (II Chronicles 20:15)**;
3. How the Moabites and the Ammonites fought among themselves, and perished to the last man.

HOMILY

-on the divinity of the Son and His unity of Essence with the Father-

He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father (John 14:9).

Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us (John 14:8). To these words, the Lord Jesus replied: **Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father (John 14:9).** Thus replied the Lord to His disciple. Philip wanted to see God with his bodily eyes. Yet, for three years he looked upon Christ, and did not recognize Him as God. Why? Because, before the descent of the Holy Spirit, Philip looked with the body at the body. In other words, he perceived with bodily eyes, and saw the Lord Jesus Christ as a man. He still had not seen the divinity in the Son of God Incarnate, and yet he sought to see God the Father! **He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.** By this the Lord did not want to say that He was God the Father, but that He and the Father are of one Essence. Insofar as God could reveal Himself to men, He revealed Himself through the Son, who appeared to men as a man. God the Father did not become incarnate; God the Holy Spirit did not become incarnate; but God the Son did become incarnate. How then, could He show His Father to the bodily eyes of a mortal man? This is precisely why the Son became incarnate, to reveal Himself to men-Himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit: consubstantial unity, in three Persons. **He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.** Here, the Lord speaks of His divine nature. In that, he is completely equal and of one Essence with the Father. So it is that, had Philip perceived the divine nature of Christ, he would not have made the request: **Show us the Father.** Naturally, he could not have seen the divine nature, as it is spiritual and invisible; but he could see-and see clearly-the great works of Christ as a manifestation of His divine nature. Brethren, even today, some men say: "Show us God and we will believe!" We should say to them: "Behold, we show you the Lord Jesus-believe!" "I have been with you for nineteen centuries, O men, and have you not recognized Me?" Nineteen centuries filled with His glory, miracles, power, grace, mercy, saints and martyrs! And there are still imbeciles who ask: "Where is God?"

O Lord Christ our God, open the spiritual eyes of those who still do not see, that they may see the majesty of Thy glory.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HIEROMARTYR PHOCAS, BISHOP OF SINOPE

Phocas exercised himself in all the Christian virtues from his youth. As bishop in his birthplace, the town of Sinope on the shores of the Black Sea, he strengthened the faith of the true believers by his example and divine words and converted many idol-worshippers to the true Faith. The hard-hearted pagans were filled with rage against holy Phocas. Through a vision granted him by the Lord, he foresaw his martyrdom: Phocas saw a white dove fly down from heaven carrying a beautiful wreath of flowers in its beak, and lowered the wreath onto his head. And Phocas heard a voice, saying: ``Your cup is full and you should drink it!" From this vision the God-pleaser realized that he was soon to suffer for Christ. He was not afraid, but with gratitude toward God prepared himself for suffering. Soon after, a certain prince, Africanus, took Phocas for interrogation, and subjected him to harsh tortures. The torturers beat and wounded his whole body, and after a time of imprisonment threw him into boiling water, where this brave soldier of Christ ended his earthly life and settled in the joy of his Lord. Phocas suffered during the reign of Emperor Trajan.

2. THE HOLY PROPHET JONAH

Jonah lived more than eight hundred years before Christ. It is said that he was that son of the widow of Zarephath in Sidon whom the Prophet Elias had raised from the dead. By his three-day sojourn in the belly of the whale, he prefigured the three days that Christ lay in the tomb; and, by his deliverance from the belly of the whale, he prefigured the Lord's Resurrection from the dead. Everything else concerning this wonderful prophet can be read in the Book of Jonah.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR PHOCAS THE GARDENER

Phocas was a compatriot of the Hieromartyr Phocas. He had a garden in Sinope, near the Black Sea, that he himself cultivated. He treated all passers-by with the fruits of his garden, not missing an opportunity to feed their souls with the word of God. But a certain prince who persecuted Christians heard of him, and sent soldiers to kill him. Phocas treated the soldiers so cordially that they hesitated to kill him. However, by his own insistent request, they carried out the command and beheaded him. In that place, over his miracle-working relics, a church was soon built in his name. St. Phocas is especially venerated by sailors, and is invoked for help by all who travel by sea. Phocas suffered in the year 320.

4. THE VENERABLE COSMAS OF ZOGRAPHOU

Cosmas was of a noble family from Bulgaria. When his parents wanted him to marry, Cosmas fled to Mount Athos. He was a hermit and miracle-worker. He labored ascetically in a cave near the Monastery of Zographou. The Holy Theotokos appeared to him on more than one occasion. He is known as the greatest ascetic and miracle-worker of Zographou. The formidable cell in which Cosmas labored in silence and struggled with demons exists even today to the northwest of the Monastery of Zographou. With spiritual sight and clairvoyance, he described events in distant times and places. He died in old age, on September 22, 1323, and after a life of much labor took up his habitation in the joy of his Lord.

5. SAINT PETER THE MERCIFUL

Peter was a God-pleaser of the sixth century. (See ``Reflection" below.)

6. SAINT JONAH THE PRESBYTER

Jonah was the father of St. Theophanes, the writer of canons, and St. Theodore the Branded. Jonah was a miracle-worker and died in the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified in the ninth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROPHET JONAH

Nineveh! Nineveh resounds with sin,
And God sends Jonah to heal Nineveh.
Jonah does not want to, and flees from God!
Oh, where will you go, Jonah, to hide from the Most High?
Jonah sleeps; he sleeps and the tempest rises.
God moves slowly, but He will find you in time.
Hurled into the waves, swallowed by the whale,
``From whom did I flee?" Jonah asks himself.
``I fled from Him, from Whom one cannot hide!"
God chastises Jonah and yet delivers him,
And, by His providence, glorifies him forever.
Jonah, you do not want to speak to the Ninevites,
But through your punishment you will prophesy the immortal Christ.
You do not want to by words? Then you must, by deeds,
Prophesy Christ and the death and resurrection of the body!
Your deeds, Jonah, will not fade away,
And Christ the Lord will speak of you to men,
That, through you, the mercy of the Living God might be revealed,
By which you will be saved, as well as Nineveh.
Through you, the power of repentance shall be revealed-
The power of repentance and God's forgiveness.
You pitied the gourd, and God pitied men.
Help us to repent, O God, and save us from condemnation.

REFLECTION

When a man clearly senses God's mercy toward him, he is startled, as from a dull and senseless dream, and becomes ashamed of his long blindness to God's unceasing compassion. In the time of Emperor Justinian, the chief imperial tax collector in Africa was a certain Peter, a very wealthy but very hard and merciless man. The beggars grumbled among themselves, that not one of them had ever received alms from Peter. Then, one of them bet that he would succeed in getting alms from Peter. He persistently begged alms of the miser until Peter, in a rage, hit him with a loaf of bread, since he had nothing else close at hand. Joyfully the beggar took the bread and fled. Immediately after this Peter became seriously ill and had this vision: He was being interrogated by demons in the other world. There was a scale, and on one side of it, the demons heaped Peter's sins, making that side extremely heavy. On the other side-which was empty-angels stood, sorrowing that they had not even one good deed in Peter's life to help balance the scale. One of them said: ``We have nothing to place on the scale except one loaf of bread, with which he struck a beggar the day before yesterday." The angels placed this one loaf of bread on the empty side of the scale, and that loaf of bread outweighed the other side of the scale, laden with all of Peter's sins. When the vision was over Peter said to himself: ``Indeed, this was not an apparition but the living truth, for I saw all my sins from my youth. And when I can be helped so much by one loaf of bread that I threw at a beggar, how much help would I receive from many deeds of almsgiving, performed from the heart and with humility?" And from that time, Peter became the most compassionate man in his town. He distributed all of his possessions to the poor, and when he had finished distributing his possessions, he sold himself into slavery for thirty gold pieces and distributed even his own price as a slave to the poor as alms in the name of Christ. He was, thereafter, called Peter the Merciful.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wrath of God against King Jehoshaphat (**II Chronicles 18-20**):

1. How Jehoshaphat allied himself with the apostate King Ahab, and almost perished;
2. How he allied himself with King Ahaziah, and again suffered a great loss;
3. How God does not wish the faithful to unite with unbelievers.

HOMILY

-on God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter-

And I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever (John 14:16).

Brethren, where there is love, there are no commands; requests take the place of commands. Among those who love one another, a request has greater power than does a command among those who do not love. The Holy Trinity represents the supreme kingdom and majesty of love. Isaiah refers to the Holy Trinity as **Mighty Counsel (Isaiah 9:6)** and the Incarnate Son of God as **Angel of Great Counsel**-that is, messenger. How does this counsel relate to the unity of God? You yourself are one being, but you still take counsel with yourself. Your mind asks your will, ``Can you?" and asks your heart, ``Do you want to?" And the will and the heart ask your mind: ``Do you know how?" And, yet, even with this internal counseling with yourself, you are still one-one man, one person. Naturally, this is but a pale illustration and shadow of the Holy Trinity and Their perfect counsel, for there is complete equality and harmony of Persons in the Holy Trinity. That which the Father wills, the Son and the Holy Spirit immediately will. **And He shall give you another Comforter.** See how confident the Son of God is-that whatever He would request and counsel would immediately be confirmed in the great Divine Counsel? The Father will agree to send, and the Spirit will agree to be sent. The Son of God does not say: ``I will pray to the Father to give you, and I believe that He will give you." Rather, He says: ``I will pray and He will give you." He knows in advance that the Father will give what He asks. He knows this-if it can be thus said-from His own eternal experience. For through all eternity harmony reigns, has reigned and will reign between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **He shall give you another Comforter.** By these words, the complete equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit is revealed. In other words, ``The Father will send you **another Comforter**-equal in power with Me, of one Essence with Me and equal in honor with Me. He will be able to fully act for Me in His way in accordance with His Divine Person, which is uniquely different from My Person as the Son."

O my brethren, do you see how the undivided Holy Trinity participates in our salvation? Do you see Whose we are? Do you see what dignity is given to us mortal and sinful ones? O Most-holy and Most-glorious Trinity our God, have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE CONCEPTION OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

On this day the mercy, miracles and wisdom of God are celebrated: His mercy toward the devout and righteous parents of St. John, the aged Zacharias and Elizabeth, who all their lives had wished for and begged a child from God; His miracle, that of John's conception in the aged womb of Elizabeth; His wisdom, in the dispensation of man's salvation. God had an especially great intention for John: namely, that he be the Prophet and Forerunner of Christ the Lord, the Savior of the world. Through His angels, God announced the births of Isaac to the childless Sarah, Samson to the childless wife of Manoah, and John the Forerunner to the childless Zacharias and Elizabeth. All of these were those for whom He had special intentions, and he foretold their birth through his angels. How could children be born of aged parents? If someone desires to understand this, he should not ask men about it, for men do not know; nor should he study natural law, for this is beyond natural law. Rather, he should turn his gaze upon the power of the Almighty God, Who created the whole world from nothing, and Who needed no parents-old or young-for the creation of the first man, Adam. Instead of being curious, let us give thanks to God, Who often reveals His power, mercy and wisdom to us in ways that are beyond natural law-in which we would be imprisoned without these special miracles of God, and would fall into despair and forgetfulness of God.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR IRAIDA

In some places Iraidia is called Rhais or Raida. She was a maiden from the town of Batan in Egypt, and was therefore probably an Egyptian. Once, Iraidia went out to draw water from a well near the sea, and saw a ship laden with bound Christians: priests, deacons, monks, women and maidens. Inquiring, she learned that all of these people were being transported by the pagan persecutors to torture and death for the name of Jesus Christ. Young Iraidia's heart suddenly flared up with the desire to suffer for the Lord. Leaving her pots by the well, she boarded the ship and confessed that she too was a Christian. They immediately bound her with the others and took them all to the Egyptian city of Antinopolis. After various tortures, Iraidia was the first to be beheaded, followed by the others. She suffered honorably and was glorified at the beginning of the fourth century.

3. THE HOLY NEW MARTYR NICHOLAS PANTOPOLIS

As a young man, Nicholas suffered for the Christian Faith at the hands of the Turks in Constantinople in 1672. His father had come to Constantinople from Thessaly and, as his father owned a variety shop, he was called Pantopolis. After much pressure to become a Moslem, and after much torturing because he refused, Nicholas was beheaded and took up his abode in the Kingdom of God. His relics repose in the Monastery of Xeropotamou, on the Holy Mountain.

4. THE HOLY NEW MARTYR JOHN

John was born in a place called Konitsa in Albania. He was a Moslem of Moslem parents. After witnessing the miraculous power of the Christian Faith in various places and situations, he accepted baptism. For this, he was denounced and brought before the Turkish court. Tortured by the Turks for the Christian Faith in Aitolia, he was beheaded in the year 1814. Before his death, John cried out: ``Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom!"

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR IRAIDA

Virtuous virgin Iraidia went to fetch water,
And returned not to her mother, but went to the Lord.
Iraidia sought suffering willingly;
Christ the Lord was more precious to her than was her mother.
A boat full of martyrs was ready to depart.
``Receive me also!" Iraidia quickly cried.
``I too am a servant of Christ, for He is everything to me,
And I wish to be an instrument of His hymn,
A song of torture and suffering for the truth.-
Oh, receive me, let me perish!"
And Iraidia perished for her God,
And was made an heir of life eternal.
By her prayers, O Lord, now save us also.
Thanks be to holy Iraidia, and glory to God!

REFLECTION

He who gives to the poor, gives to Christ. This is the meaning of the Gospel teaching, and it has been confirmed in the experience of the saints. Upon his repentance, Peter the Merciful gave alms to the poor wherever the opportunity presented itself. On one occasion Peter encountered a shipwrecked man who had barely managed to save his naked body from the wreck. The man begged him for some clothing. Peter removed his costly cloak and clothed the naked man with it. Shortly afterward, Peter saw his cloak in the shop of a merchant, who had it displayed for sale. Peter was very saddened that the shipwrecked man had sold his cloak instead of using it for himself. Peter thought: "I am not worthy; the Lord does not accept my alms." But later, the Lord appeared to him in a dream. He appeared as a handsome man, brighter than the sun, with a cross on His head, wearing Peter's cloak. "Peter, why art thou sad?" asked the Lord. "My Lord, why would I not be sad, when I see that which I gave to the poor being sold at the market?" Then the Lord asked him: "Dost thou recognize this garment on Me?" Peter replied: "I recognize it, Lord; that is my garment with which I clothed the naked man." Then the Lord spoke to him again: "Therefore do not be sad; thou gavest it to the poor man, and I received it, and I praise thy deed."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sins of King Jehoram and God's punishment of him (**II Chronicles 21**):

1. How Jehoram slew all his brothers, and restored idolatry in the groves and the hills;
2. How his enemies plundered and enslaved the land;
3. How he was smitten with a grave illness of the bowels and died, and no one mourned for him.

HOMILY

-on God the Holy Spirit, Who proceedeth from the Father-

But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me (John 15:26).

Brethren, the depths of the Essence of God are unfathomable. But God has neither hidden all from us, nor did He reveal all to us. He has revealed to us as much as our weakness can bear, and as much as is necessary for our salvation. Concerning the Holy Spirit, it has been revealed to us that He **proceedeth from the Father** and is sent by the Son. Let no one seek further, lest they fall into error. Since **He proceedeth from the Father**, He is of one Essence with the Father; since He is sent by the Son to continue the Son's work, He is equal to the Son. The Lord said earlier: **The Father ... beareth witness of Me (John 8:18)**; and now He says of the Spirit of Truth that **He shall testify of Me**. Both these witnesses are the same; that is why the Lord cites one at one time and the other at another time. He Who has borne witness and He Who will bear witness are equal in Essence-for the Lord would not have the witness for the future be less than the witness for the past. Thus, we are speaking in human terms with regard to time; but in reality, the Three bear witness eternally in heaven, according to the words of the Evangelist: **For there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these Three are One (I John 5:7)**.

There are men who assert that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Who revealed this to them, and when? We know that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, for that was revealed to us by the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we reject such an addition to our Orthodox Faith, as it does not agree with the words of the Lord Himself. Yet, if we are to truly understand the words of the Most-pure Lord, our hearts must be made very pure. Therefore, we must make more of an effort to cleanse our hearts from passions, rather than obeying vain curiosity by prying into the endless depths of God's being with unclean hearts-for those who do that fall into heresy and lose their souls.

O Lord God, great and mighty, we thank Thee that Thou hast come to us through our Savior Jesus Christ; and thereby, we know that we are not the children of darkness, but rather the sons of light.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROTOMARTYR THECLA, EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES

Thecla was born in Iconium of eminent but pagan parents. As a girl of eighteen, she was betrothed to a young man at the same time that the Apostle Paul arrived in Iconium with Barnabas to preach the Gospel. Hearing Paul's testimony for three days and nights, Thecla converted to the Christian Faith, and vowed to live in virginity. Her mother, seeing that she was now ignoring her betrothed and no longer thought of marriage, tried to dissuade her, and then beat her and tortured her by starvation. Finally, this wicked mother turned Thecla over to the judge and demanded that Thecla be burned. The judge threw her into the fire, but God preserved her unharmed. Then, Thecla followed the Apostle Paul, and went to Antioch with him. Attracted by Thecla's external beauty, a certain elder of the city wanted to take her for himself by force, but Thecla escaped his grasp. The pagan elder accused her to the eparch as a Christian who disdained marriage. The eparch condemned her to death, and had her thrown to wild beasts, but the wild beasts did not touch the body of this holy virgin. Amazed by this, the eparch asked her: "Who are you and what kind of power is in you, that nothing can harm you?" Thecla replied: "I am a servant of the Living God." The eparch then released her, and she departed to preach the Gospel. She succeeded in converting many to the true Faith, among whom was Tryphena, a prominent and honorable widow. Then, having received the blessing of the Apostle Paul to do so, Thecla withdrew to a secluded place near Seleucia. There she lived a life of asceticism for a long time and, by healing the sick with wonderworking power, she converted many to Christianity. The doctors and soothsayers in Seleucia were envious of her, and sent some young men to defile her, hoping that the loss of her virginity would also mean the loss of her miraculous power. Thecla fled from these arrogant young men, but as they were about to catch her, she prayed to God for help. A large rock opened up and hid this holy virgin and bride of Christ. This rock was her refuge and her tomb. St. John Chrysostom says of this wonderful Christian heroine and saint: "It seems to me that as I see this blessed virgin, in one hand she offers Christ virginity, and in the other hand, martyrdom."

2. SAINT STEFAN, THE FIRST-CROWNED KING OF SERBIA

Stefan was crowned at his royal foundation Zhicha by St. Sava, his brother and spiritual father. He was a devout Christian and a wise and peace-loving ruler. Stefan, with St. Sava, elevated Orthodoxy to great glory among his people. According to his wish, St. Sava tonsured him a monk before his death, and gave him the name Simon. He entered into rest in the Lord on September 24, 1224, and his miracle-working relics repose in Studenica Monastery.

St. David, (formerly Prince Dimitrije) the son of Stefan's brother Vukan, built the Monastery of Lim where he himself was tonsured a monk.

The holy King Vladislav, son of King Stefan, built the Monastery of Miliesheva, to which he translated the relics of St. Sava from Trnovo. He distinguished himself by a special compassion for the poor. On the coinage of his time, he had inscribed: "Vladislav, the servant of Christ."

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROTOMARTYR THECLA, EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES

St. Thecla, Equal to the Apostles,
The first martyr of the virgins,
Submitted her body to her spirit,
And her spirit and body to Almighty Christ.
Therefore all things submitted to her.
Terrible fire and fierce beasts,
Demons and the infirmities of men-
All submitted to faith and purity,
All were obedient to holy innocence,
The innocence of Christ's bride.
Is not a mother a most great treasure?
Yet what is a mother compared to Christ?
And the betrothed, made of the earth,
Is as dust before the glory of Christ.
Riches and earthly beauty-
A passing dream and wind that blows away.
Only one Rock stands forever,
And fears neither tempest nor time,
And is the Bridegroom of Thecla the martyr:
He is Christ, the King of kings.
Holy Thecla, illumined in Paradise,
Pray to Christ the Savior,
And save us sinners from our sins.

REFLECTION

Every saint is close to the place where he is invoked for help, or where his sanctity is commemorated and glorified. Those who are clairvoyant see the saints. If those who are not clairvoyant truly believe, they will see them in due time. Even as a young monk, St. Cosmas of Zographou had this gift. Once, on the Feast of the Annunciation, he went with several other monks to the Monastery of Vatopedi for this, their main feast. During the church service, and during the meal in the refectory, Cosmas saw a woman of royal beauty and majesty, who authoritatively organized, directed, and even served. This was not a momentary vision, but continued for a long time, both in the church and in the refectory. Cosmas was perplexed and startled by this vision. It was not at all proper for a woman to be in a monastery of the Holy Mountain. When he related this vision to his brother monks at Zographou, all the while protesting the presence of women on the Holy Mountain, the astonished monks explained to him that she was the Queen of the Holy Mountain, the Most-holy Theotokos. Then the perplexed heart of Cosmas was filled with great joy. St. Cosmas was so gifted with spiritual sight that, later, as an old hermit in his cave, he saw the soul of the abbot of Hilandar ascending to heaven, struggling to pass through the tollhouses, tormented by demons. Cosmas immediately sent someone to ask the brethren at Hilandar to pray to God for the soul of their reposed abbot. Matins had just been dismissed, and the monks and the abbot had just left the church. Hearing Cosmas's message, the monks laughed, saying that their abbot had just gone to his cell to prepare for Divine Liturgy. But when they entered the cell they found their abbot dead.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sin of King Ahaziah and God's punishment of him (**II Chronicles 22**):

1. How Ahaziah did that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, and associated with the sinful house of Ahab;
2. How Ahaziah was slain with many of his kinsmen.

HOMILY

-on God the Holy Spirit, the Glorifier-

He [the Holy Spirit] shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you (John 16:14).

The Holy Spirit is equal in might with the Father and the Son. All that the Father can do, the Son can do, and so can the Holy Spirit. All that the Father knows, the Son knows, and so does the Holy Spirit. But, according to Their infinite love for one another, and according to Their infinite wisdom with regard to the dispensation of man's salvation, They appear in turn to men from the point of view of time. As the Father glorifies the Son, so the Son glorifies the Father, and the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son. **He shall glorify Me.** Did not the Son glorify Himself? Yes, He did, but not to the extent that He could have; rather only to the extent that men of that time could receive and endure it. In time, the Holy Spirit will reveal an even greater glory of the Son of God, when He, the All-gracious One, will fill the faithful with His gifts of grace. He shall glorify Me. Brethren, the Lord also speaks these words as a lesson to us, so that if we perform some good work, we shall leave it to others to glorify us, and not seek to glorify ourselves. **For He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you.**

With these words, the Lord revealed the unity of the Spirit of God with Him, and not the subordination of the Spirit. Before this, He said: **He will guide you into all truth (John 16:13).** So that the disciples would not think that the Spirit knows more of the truth than the Son, or that the Spirit is greater than the Son, He revealed that the Spirit **shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you.** Christ was able to guide the disciples into all truth, but at the time, the disciples were not prepared to receive all truth. Therefore, the Holy Spirit will guide them into all truth, at the proper time. Yet, in revealing all truth to them, the Spirit will reveal nothing that is not known to the Son, let alone anything that is contrary to the knowledge and will of the Son. That is why the Lord said: **For He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you.**

O wondrous unity of the Holy Trinity, O power of the Triune Flame, light and love from one and the same fire! O Holy and Most-holy Trinity, kindle divine love in our hearts.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE EUPHROSYNE

Euphrosyne was the daughter of Paphnutius, a wealthy and distinguished man of Alexandria. Her childless parents had besought God with prayer for the birth of a child, and they were given her. Her devout parents raised their daughter in the Christian Faith. Not wanting to enter into marriage, the young Euphrosyne hid from her father, changed into men's clothing, and presented herself to the abbot of a monastery as a eunuch of Emperor Theodosius, giving the name Smaragdus. The abbot received her, and turned her over to the spiritual father Agapitus for guidance. By her fasting and prayerful asceticism, Smaragdus quickly surpassed all the monks in that monastery. When she had completed thirty-eight years of strict asceticism, her father Paphnutius visited that monastery, and the abbot directed him to Smaragdus for prayer and counsel. Smaragdus recognized Paphnutius, but Paphnutius did not recognize Smaragdus. When the father confessed his grief for his lost daughter, Smaragdus told him not to lose hope, for he would see his daughter again in this life, and besought him to come again within three days. When Paphnutius came again, Smaragdus was on her deathbed. The dying one said to Paphnutius: "I am Euphrosyne, your daughter; you are my father!" For a long time, the father was unable to come to himself due to his severe shock. Then, the Blessed Euphrosyne breathed her last, and her father wept over her. After burying her, Paphnutius himself entered the monastery, and settled in the cell of his holy, reposed daughter. After ten years of asceticism, Paphnutius also entered into rest in the Lord.

2. THE VENERABLE SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

Sergius was a great ascetic and light of the Russian Church. He was born in 1313, in Rostov, of devout parents, Cyril and Maria. After his parents' deaths, Bartholomew-for that was his baptismal name-became a monk, and founded the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in the forests of Radonezh. As a quiet and gentle servant of God, he knew only labor and prayer. Because of the purity of his heart he was made worthy of the gift of miracle-working, even resurrecting the dead in the name of Christ. The Holy Theotokos appeared to him many times. Princes and bishops came to him for advice. He blessed Prince Dimitri Donskoy, and foretold his victory in the battle for the liberation of Russia from the Tartars. He saw into the hearts of men as well as future events. His monastery was full of monks, even during his lifetime and, century after century, has been one of the most important centers of spiritual life and God's miracles. St. Sergius entered into rest in the year 1392. Following his repose, he appeared many times to various people.

3. THE VENERABLE EUPHROSYNE OF SUZDAL

Euphrosyne's baptismal name was Theodula. She was the daughter of Michael Vsevolodovich, and the betrothed of Menas, the Prince of Suzdal. She did not at all desire to marry, and prayed to God to preserve her as a virgin until death. When they took her to Suzdal to be married, her betrothed, Menas, suddenly died. Euphrosyne did not return to the home of her parents but entered a convent, where she labored in asceticism until her repose. God endowed her with the gift of working miracles. She entered into rest in the year 1250.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

An example of prayerful meekness
From his youth, holy Sergius
Loved God and God's beauty,
And instilled serenity and goodness in himself.
He filled the wilderness with ceaseless prayer,
And transformed the forest into a holy place of God.
He cared not for worldly vanity,
Nor was he ever angered.
He was utterly quiet and meek with everyone,
Yet not meek toward the wicked adversary.
With the foe of God, the father of all lies,
Who seeks to devour the souls of men,
Sergius bravely waged a bitter struggle,
Tireless and powerful unto the final victory.
Thus the elder reposed, but the saint remained
As a fiery pillar for the Russian people,
Beseeching God for every blessing
And bringing blessings down from heaven to his people.
Holy Sergius, do not cease to shine,
Do not cease to pray to the Most-high God
For the good of the Church, for the good of Russia,
In the glory of Christ, O Saint Sergius!

REFLECTION

A saint does not shine outwardly. All of his riches are within, in his soul. A peasant came from afar to the monastery to see St. Sergius. When he asked the monks for the abbot, they told him he was working in the garden. The peasant went to the garden, and there saw a man in poor, ragged clothes, digging like any other peasant on a farm. The peasant returned to the monastery dissatisfied, thinking that the monks had made fun of him. So, to make things clear, he asked again for the glorious holy father, Sergius. Just then, Sergius returned to the monastery, and welcomed the peasant, serving him at the table. The saint saw into the heart of his guest, and knew the low opinion he had of his appearance. He consoled him by promising that he would see Sergius in a little while. A prince and his boyars then arrived at the monastery, and they all bowed low to St. Sergius, and asked his blessing. The monks then removed the peasant from the room in order to make room for the new guests. In amazement the peasant looked on from a distance, to see that the one he had sought had been nearby all the time. The peasant rebuked himself for his ignorance, and was greatly ashamed. When the prince departed, the peasant quickly approached the saint, fell at his feet and began to beg his forgiveness. The great saint embraced him and said to him: "Do not grieve, my son, for you are the only one who knew the truth about me, considering me to be nothing-while others were deluded, taking me for something great."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness and sin of King Joash, and God's reward and punishment (**II Chronicles 24**):

1. How, at first, Joash hearkened to the high priest Jehoiada, and did that which is right in the sight of the Lord;
2. How God blessed Joash with a long and peaceful reign;
3. How Joash changed, and slew the righteous son of Jehoiada, and committed other evils;
4. How a small Syrian army defeated Joash, and plundered the land; and, how Joash, gravely ill, was slain in bed by his servants.

HOMILY

-on the shared riches of the Father and the Son-

All things that the Father hath are Mine (John 16:15).

These are some of the last words of Christ the Lord before His passion. They are the weightiest words-for they reveal the divinity of Christ the Savior to the world, and in connection with the words, **He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you (John 16:14)**, also reveal the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. That which the Spirit will receive of Mine cannot be different or contrary to that which is the Father's, for **All things that the Father hath are Mine**. Why did our Lord not say, "He will take Mine," but rather, **He shall receive of Mine**? Because the Holy Spirit will not reveal everything to men, but only a part of everything-as much as men can bear, and as much as is necessary for them. One part of God's gifts are given to the faithful on earth, and another part will be given to them in the Heavenly Kingdom. This heavenly part is that which the visionary Apostle describes: **Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him (I Corinthians 2:9)**. All this, and incomparably more, is part of Christ's possession. His possession encompasses not only this world, but also the other world, and it is incomparably greater and more precious than both worlds. Eternity is His, immortality is His, perfect might is His, perfect wisdom is His, perfect love is His, and perfect goodness is His, as are mercy and justice and truth. What else can we think of or express that is good? All perfection is His, and it transcends everything that earthly man can ever conceive of. The Father has all this, the Son has all this, and the Holy Spirit has all this. **All things that the Father hath are Mine**. By these words, the indescribably wealthy One, the unequaled Son of the King, Jesus Christ, revealed His boundless and inconceivable riches to His disciples on the dark night when He was about to stand barefoot before the Jewish elders to be scourged and spat upon.

O our God, Most-holy and Most-abundant Trinity, have mercy on us sinners, and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

John was the son of Zebedee the fisherman and Salome the daughter of Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Theotokos. Called by the Lord Jesus, John immediately left his father and his fishermen's nets and, with his brother James, followed Christ. From then on, he was not separated from his Lord until the end. With Peter and James, he was present at the raising of Jairus's daughter and the Transfiguration of the Lord. At the Last Supper, he inclined his head on Jesus' breast. When all the other apostles had abandoned the crucified Lord, John and the Holy Mother of God remained beneath the Cross. In obedience to the Lord, he was as a son to the Holy Virgin Mary, and carefully served and watched over her until her Dormition. After her Dormition, John took his disciple Prochorus to preach the Gospel in Asia Minor. He lived and labored mostly in Ephesus. By his inspired preaching and miracles he converted many to Christianity and shook paganism to its foundation. The embittered pagans bound him and sent him to Rome, to face Emperor Dometian. Dometian had him tortured and flogged, but neither the bitterest poison he was given to drink, nor the boiling oil into which he was thrown, did him any harm. This terrified the emperor and, thinking him immortal, Dometian sent him into exile to the island of Patmos. There St. John converted many to Christianity by words and miracles, and confirmed well the Church of God. He also wrote his Gospel and Revelation on Patmos. In the time of Emperor Nero, who granted freedom to all prisoners, John returned to Ephesus, where he lived for some time, confirming the work he had begun earlier. He was over one hundred years old when he went to the Lord. When his disciples later opened his grave, they did not find his body. On May 8 of every year, a fine dust, fragrant and healing, rose from his grave. After a long, laborious and fruitful life on earth, this beloved disciple of Christ, a true pillar of the Church, took up his habitation in the joy of His Lord.

2. THE VENERABLE NILUS OF CALABRIA

Nilus was a great ascetic among the Greeks of Calabria. The founder of several monasteries, he was a miracle-worker and a defender of the purity of the Orthodox Faith. He undertook a long journey to save a man from grave punishment. He had an ardent love for his neighbor, and entered into rest in the year 1005. Nilus left many worthy disciples, among whom was the distinguished St. Bartholomew, the writer of several canons, who reposed in 1044.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

St. John the Evangelist,
Son of Zebedee the fisherman,
Was young when the love
Of Jesus greatly warmed him.

The most faithful friend of the Lord,
With a pure, virginal soul,
With a soul pure and loving,
Visionary and heroic.

He proclaimed wondrous mysteries
And removed the seal from eternity.
He saw the destiny of the world,
from the beginning to the end.

He preached love,
And in love he walked;
To the throne of the Most-high God
He was raised up in love.

And with love he was exalted
Like a snow-capped mountain:
The Son of Thunder, an awesome prophet,
But meek and tender in heart.

O John, seer of wonders,
O thundering saint-
Bear our small petitions
To your Friend, the Savior!

Bring us close to Him,
The powerful God, the sweet God;
And though we are not worthy of His bosom,
At least bring us close-to His feet!

REFLECTION

Thus writes the Apostle James: **Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:20).** The apostles of Christ did not simply speak thus, but confirmed it by their work. St. Clement of Alexandria relates that, somewhere in Asia Minor, St. John the Apostle had baptized a pagan youth and entrusted him to the care of the local bishop, while he went on further to preach the Gospel. In John's absence, this young man became corrupt, and began to drink and steal, and finally joined a band of thieves in the forest, who attacked men and robbed them. After a while John returned, and heard from the bishop what had happened to this young man. Then Apostle John, not wasting a moment, found a horse and a guide and rushed to the forest where the robbers were to be found. Searching through the forest the saint found them, and confronted their leader. When the young man recognized John, he began to flee. Though aged, John chased him and, despite his old age, caught him. The young man fell at the feet of the apostle and, in shame, could not look him in the eye. John embraced and kissed him, as a shepherd does upon finding his lost sheep. The saint brought him back to town and confirmed him anew in the Faith and in virtuous life. Thereafter pleasing God, this young man entered into rest in due time.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the divided heart of King Amaziah toward God, and God's punishment (**II Chronicles 25**):

1. How Amaziah at first did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and God granted him victory over the Edomites;
2. How Amaziah brought the Edomite idols (which had not helped the Edomites) to Jerusalem, and worshiped them;
3. How God permitted the Israelites to defeat him, and a rebellion was raised against him and killed him.

HOMILY

-on prayer inspired by love-

Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy word is truth (John 17:17).

When a mother is led to death, she worries more about the children whom she leaves behind than about herself. Such is the bond of great love. The Lord Jesus Christ had an even greater love for His disciples than that of a mother for her children. Going to His death, the Lord prayed to His heavenly Father for His disciples. He prayed, not because He lacked power to help them, but prayed to the Father to show the unity of His being with, and love for, His Father. But why did He then ascribe Truth to the Father, when before that He referred to **the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17)**, saying to the disciples: **The Spirit of Truth ... will guide you into all truth (John 16:13)**? To demonstrate the equality of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Did He not first say of Himself: **I am the Truth (John 14:6)**? And, afterward, did He not call the Holy Spirit the Comforter, **the Spirit of Truth**? And He now ascribes truth to the Father as well: **Sanctify them by Thy truth!** He who would see any contradiction in this does not comprehend God as Unity and Trinity-Unity of Essence and Trinity of Persons. In that He ascribes truth as something essential to each Person of the Divine Trinity, the Lord demonstrates the equality of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For if one Person of the Divine Trinity would possess less truth, He would be lesser, in Essence, than the other two Persons. With a lessening of truth, there is also a lessening of power, love and wisdom. Therefore, the Lord referred to Himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit as Truth, so that men would know and believe in Their complete, essential unity. Therefore let none of the faithful be deluded by any lie asserting an inequality of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Everyone should endeavor to wipe his heart clean of sin, as one cleans a mirror: only then can we truly perceive the great truth of the equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

O Triune and Divine Truth, enlighten us with Thyself, and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR CALLISTRATUS

Callistratus was born in Carthage. He was a Christian from birth, for his father and grandfather were Christians. One of Callistratus's ancestors, Neochorus by name, was a soldier in Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate, at the time of the Crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Witnessing the many miracles at the time of Christ's death, Neochorus believed in Him, and was instructed in the Faith and baptized by an apostle. Returning home to Carthage, Neochorus brought his Christian Faith with him as a precious pearl. So it was that in time Callistratus was born, baptized and raised a Christian. While he was in the army there were no other Christians in his regiment besides him. One of his companions, seeing how St. Callistratus arose at night and prayed to God, reported him as a Christian to the commander, Persentinian. Persentinian was a cruel torturer of Christians. In order to confirm that Callistratus was indeed a Christian, the commander ordered him to offer sacrifice to the idols, which Callistratus straightway refused to do. He was then severely beaten and thrown into the sea. However, the power of God saved him, and he emerged from the sea in sound health. Seeing Callistratus's endurance and miracles, forty-nine other soldiers came to believe in Christ. They were beaten and thrown into prison with Callistratus. In prison Callistratus taught his companions the Faith, and strengthened them. They displayed great bravery in suffering, and the Lord manifested great power through them. Then the evil torturer sent soldiers to the prison by night, and they slew St. Callistratus and his forty-nine companions. They suffered for the truth in the year 304. A church was later built over their relics.

2. THE HOLY APOSTLES MARK, ARISTARCHUS AND ZENAS

Mark, Aristarchus and Zenas were apostles of the Seventy. St. Mark was also known as John. The holy apostles gathered for prayer at the house of his mother Mary in Jerusalem (**Acts 12:12**). He preached the Gospel with the Apostles Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 12:25**). After that, Mark was bishop in the town of Byblos. St. Aristarchus, a fellow traveler of the Apostle Paul, was bishop in Syrian Apamea (**Acts 19:29**). St. Zenas (or Zena) was described as a lawyer by the Apostle Paul (**Titus 3:13**). He was bishop in Palestinian Lydda. They shone as stars in the darkness of paganism, and brought many to the Christian Faith. Now they shine as stars in the Kingdom of Christ, their Beloved.

3. THE HOLY NEW MARTYR AQUILINA

Aquilina was from the village of Zaklivera, in the Diocese of Jedrene. She was a girl of eighteen. Her father embraced Islam, and even pressured her to become a Moslem, but her mother supported her in the Christian Faith. After many torments, totally wounded and bloodied, she breathed her last on her mother's lap, and received the victor's wreath of martyrdom on September 27, 1764.

4. THE VENERABLE SABBATIUS OF SOLOVKI

Sabbatius is commemorated together with St. Zosimas on April 17. Today is commemorated the fact that he reposed in the Lord on September 27, 1435.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR CALLISTRATUS

St. Callistratus prayed to God,
He prayed to God and gave thanks to Him.
During torture for the Christian Faith,
The torturer mocked Callistratus:
"You believe in Christ the Crucified One!
When I send you from this world,
There will not remain one Christian
In all of this great city."
St. Callistratus prayed to God,
He prayed to God, and said to the judge:
"You will crush my sinful body,
And stain the earth with my blood,
But a church will be built upon that blood.
By your sword I will attain my goal!"
As St. Callistratus spoke, so it happened:
His blood, like a clear trumpet-call
Quickly awakened the conscience of men.
The city was baptized, the church was built,
And the martyr achieved his goal.
Now in heaven, in the heavenly army,
The soldier of Christ, St. Callistratus
And his companions, among the angels,
Pray to God to deliver us as well,
That through us too the Lord would be glorified!

REFLECTION

All our riches, glory and honor are as a brief repast that ends at death. No one takes a single crumb of this meal into the other world. Blessed is the one who understands that the soul is his only possession that is not diminished by anything, not even by death. Such a one thinks only of three realities: death, the soul, and God the Judge. Abba Evagrius teaches: "Hold your approaching death and the Judgment constantly in your mind, and you will preserve your soul from sin." All our bodily cares in this life are like cares about a meal which must soon be cut short. St. Isaiah the Solitary says: "Have death before your eyes every day: think constantly about how you will separate from the body, how you will pass through the region of the powers of darkness who will meet you in the air, and how you will present yourself before God. Prepare yourself for the Dread Day of answering to the Judgment of God, as though you already behold it now." One day, John, a rich merchant, came to St. Sabbatius of Solovki and brought him many alms. Sabbatius did not accept any of it, but rather told the donor to distribute all of it to the needy. John became very sad at this, and the saint, in order to comfort him and make everything clear to him said: "John, my son, stay here and rest until tomorrow, and then you will see the grace of God." John obeyed. The next day, John entered the cell of Sabbatius and saw the elder in final repose, and sensed a wonderful fragrance in the cell. He who foresees the end of his life does not think of worldly goods.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness of King Uzziah, and God's reward (**II Chronicles 26**):

1. How the king did that which is right in the sight of the Lord;
2. How, as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.

HOMILY

-on Christ's last prayer for the faithful-

That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee (John 17:21).

Brethren, God's mercy is great. When a righteous man feels it, he weeps; but when a sinner feels it, he is ashamed. By the mercy of God, we are cleansed, illumined, saved, adopted and united with God Himself. However, no one should construe that, by this unity with God, we become of the same Essence with God and equal to God. We will never be of one Essence with God, nor equal to God, in the way in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of one Essence and equal in being. **That they all may be one** the Savior says to His Father on behalf of His disciples, **as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee**, and here He is thinking of the unity of love and not of the unity of nature. From love flows mutual obedience, mutual help, mutual mercy, meekness, humility, goodness, good will and sacrifice. And when the Lord says, **Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48)**, He does not mean that men can be equal to God, but means to show them the supreme example of perfection in every good thing. For many teachers of men have pointed to examples of perfection in some thing or some person, but not in God. Often enough, they have taught men evil, and pointed to it as an example of perfection. That is why the Lord teaches men to take the Heavenly Father as an example of every perfection, and to labor and strive for that true perfection, and not some other. By the grace of God, we are all adopted of God and become **one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28)**. However, we do not become gods; we do not become equal with the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Do not forget that it is said in the Scriptures: **The heavens are not clean in His sight (Job 15:15)**. The majestic powers of the heavens are not even equal to Him, so what then of man? However, by the grace of God, and because of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, the faithful are raised up into unity with God, in love and spirit. Therefore, let us make an effort to do the will of God, that we in truth may be raised up to such majestic heights.

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who art the God of every mercy and goodness; uphold us in Thy mercy to the end, and be not angry with us, but rather forgive us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE CHARITON THE CONFESSOR

Chariton was a distinguished and devout citizen of the city of Iconium. Imbued with the spirit of his compatriot, St. Thecla, Chariton openly confessed the name of Christ. When a bitter persecution of Christians began during the reign of Emperor Aurelian, Chariton was immediately brought to trial before the eparch. The judge ordered him to worship the gods, but Chariton replied: "All your gods are demons, and were cast from the heavens into the nethermost hell." Chariton clearly proclaimed his faith in the One Living God, the Creator of all, and the Lord Jesus, the Savior of mankind. The eparch ordered that he be tortured and beaten, until his whole body was like one great wound. When Aurelian's evil deeds caught up with him and he died an evil death, Chariton was freed from torture and prison. He then set out for Jerusalem. On the way he was seized by robbers, but escaped from them by God's providence. Chariton, not wanting to return to Iconium again, withdrew to the wilderness of Pharan, where he founded a monastery and gathered monks. He established a rule for the monastery and then, to avoid the praise of men, withdrew to another wilderness near Jericho. There he founded another monastery called the Monastery of Chariton. Finally, he founded a third monastery, Souka, which the Greeks called the Old Lavra. Chariton died at a great old age, and took up his abode in the glory of his Lord on September 28, 350. His relics repose in his first monastery. The composition of the rite of monastic tonsure is attributed to St. Chariton.

2. THE HOLY PROPHET BARUCH

He was a disciple and faithful friend of the great prophet Jeremiah. He prophesied the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity, the destruction of Babylon, and the coming of the Son of God to earth. It is held that he was slain by the Jews in Egypt, as was the Prophet Jeremiah, in the seventh century before Christ.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR MARK THE SHEPHERD

At the time of Diocletian, Magnus, the magistrate of Antioch, went hunting with his soldiers. Pursuing a wild beast, the soldiers saw that it fled to the shepherd Mark, who was tending his flock there. The beast fawned around Mark, a man of God. Seeing this, thirty soldiers listened to Mark's explanation of the Faith, and believed in Christ. They were soon beheaded. The magistrate then bound Mark, took him to town and summoned three brothers, Alexander, Alphaeus and Zosimas, who were blacksmiths. He ordered them to make instruments of torture with which to torment Mark. All three of them, after conversing with St. Mark, confessed the Christian Faith, and ignored the magistrate's order. The magistrate sentenced them to death, and ordered that molten lead be poured into their mouths. After this, the saintly Mark was beheaded, and his head was mockingly placed in the temple of Artemis. Because of this, that temple was destroyed by the power of God.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR VATSLAV [WENCESLAUS], KING OF THE CZECHS

Vatslav was the grandson of St. Ludmilla. As king, he labored in the Faith like the great ascetics, and strengthened the Orthodox Faith among his people. He was strict in ensuring that no innocent person suffer in the courts. In his zeal for the Christian Faith and in his love for his fellow man, St. Vatslav purchased pagan children who were being sold as slaves, and immediately baptized them and raised them as Christians. He translated the Gospel of St. John into the Czech language, and transported the relics of St. Vitus and St. Ludmilla to Prague. His brother Boleslav invited him to be his guest, and then killed him in his court. Immediately after this, Boleslav brought in German priests and had the services celebrated in Latin. St. Vatslav suffered in the year 935 and his relics repose in Prague.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR VATSLAV, KING OF THE CZECHS

From a wicked mother, good fruit was born:
St. Vatslav, who pleased God.
His wicked mother gave him only a body,
But his grandmother-light and faith and hope.
The glorious grandmother, pious Ludmilla,
Nurtured Vatslav's soul.
As a white lily, Vatslav grew,
And adorned himself with innocence.
As the king reigned, the people rejoiced,
And with their king they honored God.
Yet the adversary of man never sleeps or dozes,
Laying sinful snares for every soul,
And he incited Boleslav against Vatslav.
"For what, my brother, do you want my head?"
Vatslav asked, but was still beheaded!
But the evildoer did not escape God.
The soul of St. Vatslav went
Before the Most-high God, the Just,
The One he had always adored,
And with Ludmilla, Vatslav now prays
For his people, that they be strengthened in faith.
St. Vatslav, beautiful as an angel!

REFLECTION

In guiding the dispensation of this world, and especially of His Holy Church, God often makes unexpected moves, and changes the evil destiny of His servants to the good. This occurred many times in the life of St. Chariton. Following cruel tortures, Chariton was thrown into prison and was promised certain death. Then, Emperor Aurelian died unexpectedly, and the new emperor freed the Christian captives. Thus, Chariton escaped death. Then, when he was traveling to Jerusalem, robbers seized him and took him to their cave. They left him there, and went off to rob and plunder, with the intention of killing him when they came back. In this cave there was a wine cask into which a poisonous snake had crawled, drunk of the wine, and vomited its venom into the cask. When the robbers returned, tired and thirsty from the heat, they drank the venomous wine and, one by one, fell dead. And thus, St. Chariton was saved from death by yet another unexpected event. The Lord heaped misfortunes upon His servant, in order that by these misfortunes He would temper and purify him as gold is tempered and purified by fire, and that He might bind him even more securely to Himself. He delivered him from death, because Chariton had yet to establish several monasteries where, by his ascetic example, he would direct many human souls on the path of salvation.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate King Uzziah's turning to evil (**II Chronicles 26**):

1. How Uzziah became proud and corrupt when, with God's help, he became strong;
2. How he violated the Law, took the censer, and strove to serve in the Temple against the protests of the priests.

HOMILY

-on Christ's last prayer for the faithful-

Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am (John 17:24).

Behold the recompense of God's laborers! Behold the glorious reward of the followers of Christ! That which the Son of God desires, the Father desires and the Holy Spirit also desires. And that which the Holy Trinity desires, comes to pass. What does the Lord, the Son of God, desire? He desires that His disciples be together with Him in the Heavenly Kingdom-and not only His twelve disciples, but also all those **which shall believe on Me through their word (John 17:20)**. My brethren, we who are baptized and who have received the Faith of the apostles and have kept it, are also numbered among these-but only under the condition that we ourselves do not disown that great treasure by our misdeeds, by apostasy from the Faith, by the impurity of sin, or by blasphemous words and thoughts. The Lord further says: **Father I will ... that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me (John 17:24)**. No one should conclude from these words that the Son is less than the Father. For the Lord Himself said to His Father: **I have glorified Thee (John 17:4)**. Do you see the equality of the Father and the Son, and the boundlessness of Their mutual love? **I have glorified Thee ... and now, O Father, glorify Thou Me (John 17:4, 5)**. But the fact that Christ's glory did not begin on earth or in time is shown by these words of the Lord Christ: **the glory which I had with Thee before the world was (John 17:5)**. Therefore, this is not an earthly or temporal glory: it is not worldly and human glory, but rather a heavenly, eternal, lasting and inexpressible glory. How does the Son of God want the Father to glorify Him? In such a way that He will show the heavenly and eternal glory to all those who have obeyed His Son, and who have followed after Him, and who have fulfilled His commandments. The man-loving Lord wills that, not only the apostles, but all of us who are called by His name, participate in this glory. Oh what mercy! Oh what love for mankind! Brethren, the dogma of our immortality, eternal life and eternal glory is not of men, but of our Lord and Savior Himself. May bodily cares, slothfulness at prayer, and mutual strife not separate us from this glory of Christ, from eternal life!

O gracious and merciful Lord, forgive us our sins, and grant us Thine Eternal Kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE CYRIACUS THE RECLUSE

Cyriacus was born in Corinth, to John and Eudoxia. His father John was a presbyter and Peter, Bishop of Corinth, was his kinsman. In his early youth, the bishop ordained Cyriacus a reader in the cathedral church. Reading the Holy Scripture, the young Cyriacus marveled at God's providence: how God glorified all His true servants and how He arranged the salvation of the human race. At age eighteen, Cyriacus's desire for the spiritual life led him to Jerusalem. There, he entered the monastery of a godly man Eustorgius, who gave him his first instruction in the monastic life. After that, he went to St. Euthymius, who foresaw that he would be a great spiritual father. He clothed him in the schema and sent him to St. Gerasimus at the Jordan, where Cyriacus spent nine years. Following the death of Gerasimus, he returned to the Monastery of St. Euthymius, where he remained in stillness for ten years. Then, fleeing the praise of men, he moved from place to place. He finally lived a life of asceticism in the community of St. Chariton, where he ended his earthly sojourn of 109 years. A celebrated ascetic and miracle-worker, St. Cyriacus was massive and strong in body, and remained such in deep old age, despite strict fasts and vigils. In the wilderness, he sometimes ate only raw greens for years. He was very zealous for the Orthodox Faith, denouncing all heresies, especially that of Origen. He said of himself that, since he became a monk, the sun had neither seen him eat nor become angry with anyone. According to the Rule of St. Chariton, the monks ate only once a day, after the setting of the sun. Cyriacus was a great light, a pillar of Orthodoxy, the adornment of monks, a mighty healer of the sick, and a gentle comforter of the sorrowful. Having lived long for the benefit of many, he took up his habitation in the eternal joy of his Lord in the year 557.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS DADA AND GABDELAS

Dada was a great Persian nobleman and a kinsman of King Sapor, and Gabdelas was Sapor's son. When St. Dada openly confessed his faith in Christ, King Sapor ordered that he be cruelly tortured. During these tortures, Dada worked great miracles in the name of Christ, and these so strongly influenced Gabdelas that he also believed in Christ. The pagan King did not even spare his own son, but subjected him also to harsh tortures. Both Dada and Gabdelas glorified God with their patient endurance and many miracles, and gave up their souls to God under torture. They suffered in the fourth century. Gabdelas's sister Casdoa, and Gargal the chief pagan priest, suffered with them-for they, too, had come to believe in Christ.

3. SAINT THEOPHANES THE MERCIFUL

Theophanes was a wealthy citizen from Gaza. He was so merciful that, in distributing his possessions to the poor, he impoverished himself. Toward the end of his life, he was afflicted with dropsy and died from that illness. Thereafter a healing myrrh flowed from his body, by which the sick were healed.

4. SAINT MARY OF PALESTINE

At first, Mary was a reader of the Psalter in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. Because she was of beautiful countenance, many who gazed upon her were tempted by lustful thoughts. So that she would no longer be a cause of temptation for men, Mary withdrew into the wilderness of Souka with a basket of beans and an earthenware jug of water. St. Mary lived in the wilderness for eighteen years. By God's power, neither the beans nor the water ran out. The disciples of St. Cyriacus found her during her lifetime, and later buried her.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MARY OF PALESTINE

The beautiful Mary was born beautiful,
And, faithful to Christ, she prayed to Him:
"Help me, my Lord, a helpless woman,
Show me, the lowly one, the path to salvation.
With Thy help, I struggle not to sin,
But my face is a temptation to the weakness of others."
Mary bowed with tears to the Living God,
And hid in the wilderness from the eyes of men.
Mary conversed with God, and that was her reward.
Her soul shone brighter than pure gold.
Her body withered with the passing years,
And an angel raised the heavenly woman up to Paradise.
She now rejoices, radiant among the angels,
And Saint Mary prays to God for us.

REFLECTION

In ignorance, many people labor more to avoid suffering in old age and terminal illness than to avoid the torments of hell in the life after old age and death. Such was the case of an unmarried and avaricious man who, from year to year, and with ever greater passion, amassed for himself unnecessary wealth. When asked why he strove so much to pile up excess wealth he replied: "I am gathering it for my old age. This wealth will heal and feed me in old age and sickness." And indeed, his foreboding came true. In old age, a grave and long-lasting illness befell him. He distributed his accumulated wealth to physicians so they would heal him, and to servants so they would care for him and feed him. His wealth was soon spent, and the illness continued. The physicians and servants abandoned him, and he fell into despair. His neighbors brought him bread until his death, and he was buried at the expense of the community. He had used his wealth for that which he had intended it. God had even done for him according to the man's will. God had sent him the illness that he had, in a sense, desired, and for which he had prepared great wealth. Nevertheless, all his wealth was unable to alleviate his sufferings in this world-so with what would he be able to alleviate his sufferings in the other world? Nothing, if he took with him neither faith, nor hope, nor charitable deeds, nor prayers, nor repentance! Someone saw a departed man in the great glory of Paradise, and asked him how he had become worthy of that glory. The man replied: "In my earthly life I was the hireling of an evil-doer who never paid me. But I endured all and served him to the end, with hope in God." Then the onlooker saw another man in even greater glory, and when he asked him, that one replied: "I was a leper, and to the very end I offered gratitude to God for that." But no one saw in the glory of Paradise the man who had amassed money for illness in old age.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the punishment with which God punished King Uzziah (**II Chronicles 26**):

1. How, in his conceit, Uzziah unlawfully approached the sanctuary of God;
2. How leprosy suddenly appeared on his forehead.

HOMILY

-on knowing the Father through the Son-

**O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee:
but I have known Thee (John 17:25).**

An equal knows his equal best. The lower does not know the higher, or the mortal the immortal. The Old Testament prophets and some of the wise men of ancient times knew God as the Creator and the Provider, but no one knew Him as the Father of the Son. Those who knew Him in ancient times knew Him through creation, and not through birth. Through creation they knew something of the righteousness, wisdom and power of God; but they did not know His love, for love is known through birth. A father knows the mystery of the one born, and the one born knows the love of the parent. It could be put this way: "**The world hath not known Thee**, for the world looked at Thee as Lord and itself as a slave; **But I have known Thee**, for I see Thee as Father and feel Thine inexpressible love. The world looks at Thee through the veil of Thy works; but I look at Thee face to face, in the eternal beauty of Thy love." The Lord brought this illuminating flame of eternal filial and paternal love among men, so that men could see God in this flame, in this new and hitherto unknown light. The Lord passed this new knowledge of God's love to His apostles, and through them to us.

Oh, may this flame of divine eternal love burn in us! May we thus know God as our Father, and ourselves as His children, adopted through the sacrifice of the Only-begotten Son of God.

O God of Triune Flame, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: illumine us also, darkened as we are by sin, with the eternal glory of Thy love.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT GREGORY THE ENLIGHTENER, BISHOP OF ARMENIA

Gregory was born of a prominent family which was related to the royal houses of Persia (King Arteban) and Armenia (King Khosrov). When these two houses made war against each other, Gregory withdrew to Caesarea in Cappadocia. It was there that he first learned of the Christian Faith, was baptized and married. He had two sons of this marriage, Bardanes and Aristakes, and dedicated them both to the service of the Church. After the death of his wife, Gregory returned to Armenia and placed himself in the service of King Tiridates. He faithfully served him, and Tiridates loved Gregory. But when the king learned that Gregory was a Christian, he became greatly enraged and pressured him to deny Christ and worship idols. Not succeeding in this, Tiridates subjected Gregory to many harsh tortures, then threw him into a deep pit full of poisonous reptiles to kill him. However, the All-seeing God preserved St. Gregory's life in that pit for fourteen full years. After that, Tiridates set out to persecute all Christians in his kingdom, and attacked a convent where there were thirty-seven nuns, including the abbess, Gaiana. When he had killed all of them by terrible tortures, Tiridates went insane and was like a wild boar. His sister had a dream in which a man, dazzlingly bright, told her that Tiridates would only become well when Gregory was removed from the pit. Taken from the pit, Gregory healed and baptized Tiridates. Then, at the wish of Tiridates, Gregory became Bishop of Armenia. Through God's providence, Tiridates also helped him in enlightening all of Armenia and its surrounding regions with the Christian Faith. St. Gregory ended his earthly life of great labor in old age, in about the year 335. Meanwhile, his son Aristakes had been consecrated a bishop, and he continued the work of his father, both physically and spiritually. Aristakes was one of the 318 Holy Fathers at the First Ecumenical Council.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS GAIANA, RHIPSIMIA, AND THIRTY-FIVE OTHER NUNS

They were all slain by King Tiridates because of their faith in Christ. Rhipsimia was of unusual beauty, which tempted Emperor Diocletian to take her for his wife. This was the cause of their martyrdom. Rhipsimia refused to go with the emperor, as she had betrothed herself to Christ, her Bridegroom. Then Tiridates too was tempted and wanted to claim her for himself, for he was intoxicated by her beauty. St. Rhipsimia resisted the pagan king with all her strength, "And he who defeated the Princes of the Goths and destroyed the Persians was unable to overcome one virgin of Christ." The enraged king gave her over to cruel tortures-her tongue was cut out, her stomach cut open, and her entrails pulled out-and Rhipsimia gave up her soul to God. After this, the other nuns were seized and beheaded. The famous Monastery of Echmiadzin was built over the relics of these holy martyrs. Situated near Yerevan, it was the main spiritual center of Armenia for many centuries.

3. SAINT MICHAEL, FIRST METROPOLITAN OF KIEV

St. Michael was sent to Russia by the Patriarch of Constantinople at the request of the great Prince Vladimir, to baptize the pagan people and establish and organize the Church. St. Michael baptized the people in Kiev, Novgorod, Rostov and many other towns and villages. He organized the Church, appointed bishops and priests, laid the foundation for the Monastery of St. Michael in Kiev, and sent missionaries among the Bulgarians and Tartars, winning many of them for Christ. This saint accomplished all this, and much more of great benefit, in only four years. He went to his reward peacefully, in the year 992. His relics repose in the Monastery of the Kiev Caves.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT GREGORY THE ENLIGHTENER

Gregory was a great light
To his people and his nation.
He spurned glory and riches
For the poverty of Christ the Crucified,
Preferring eternal riches in heaven.
He raised his mind to heaven and thoughts of God,
And endured much physical torture,
As if it all were painless.
He was strong with the power of God's grace,
And nourished by God's heavenly food,
And armored against evil by God's providence.
He was lowered into the pit from his glory,
And from the pit he was elevated to the heights-
The heights of eternal glory.
Gregory, great and holy,
Enlightened Armenia with Jesus.
Even the wild boar, Tiridates,
Was baptized under the Cross and became a lamb.
With great glory, the land of Armenia glorifies
Its miracle-worker, St. Gregory.

REFLECTION

Marvelous changes occur daily in the destiny of men-in the present, as in times past. Those humiliated for the sake of God's righteousness are raised to great heights, and the blasphemers of the Faith are converted to servants of the Faith. King Tiridates threw St. Gregory into a deep pit. The saint spent fourteen years in that pit, forgotten by the entire world, but not by God. Who among men could have thought that the greatest light of the Armenian people was to be found in the darkness of a pit? And who would have ever thought that the powerful and tyrannical King Tiridates would one day save the life of that same Gregory, whom he had condemned to death, and would help him more than the rest of the whole world could help him? After fourteen years, God revealed Gregory as still alive. Gregory then miraculously healed the insane king. King Tiridates, the unrestrained persecutor of Christ, was baptized and became the greatest zealot for the Christian Faith! It could be said that, with God's help, Gregory and Tiridates were both drawn out of the pit of darkness-Gregory a physical one, and Tiridates a spiritual one. Oh, the infinite wisdom of God in governing the destinies of men! The formerly wild and passionate Tiridates was softened and ennobled so much by repentance and the Christian Faith, that he came to resemble St. Gregory more than his old, unrepentant self.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness of King Jotham and God's reward for him (**II Chronicles 27**):

1. How Jotham did that which is right in the sight of the Lord, and cared for the Temple of the Lord;
2. How God helped him, so that he was successful in war and in peace: in war he conquered, and in peace he enriched and strengthened his people.

HOMILY

-on the Kingdom not of this world-

My Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

He who has great wealth also has little wealth. Therefore, let no one think that Christ the Lord does not have royal authority over this world, even though He told Pilate: **My Kingdom is not of this world**. He who possesses the eternal also rules over the temporal. Here, the Lord speaks of His Eternal Kingdom, independent of time, decay, injustice, illusion and death. It is as if someone were to say: "My wealth is not in paper but rather in gold." If he has gold, can he not afford paper? Is not gold worth more than paper? Therefore, the Lord does not tell Pilate that He is a king, but on the contrary says that He is a higher King than all earthly kings, and that His Kingdom is greater, more powerful and more enduring than all earthly kingdoms. He is indicating His principal Kingdom, upon which all earthly kingdoms depend, in time and in space. **My Kingdom is not of this world**. This does not mean that He has no power over this world, but on the contrary confirms His awesome power over this world. All His works on earth manifest His unparalleled, lordly power over the world. Tell me, in what other king's presence is the wind quieted and the sea calmed? And have you forgotten His words in Gethsemane? **Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53)**. And just one angel has greater power than all the universe! The Lord of the soul is also the Lord of the body. The Lord of eternity is also the Lord of time. The Lord of the greatest good is also the Lord of the lesser good. Brethren, nothing can escape the power of the Almighty Jesus Christ our Lord, Who by His own will suffered for us, and by His own power rose from the grave.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our Almighty Savior, help us to seek Thy Heavenly Kingdom, and to be eternally with Thee where there is neither sin nor death, but life and joy and peace.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

OCTOBER

OCTOBER - 1 -

1. THE PROTECTION OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS

From time immemorial, the Church has celebrated the Most-holy Theotokos as the patroness and protectress of the Christian people, who, by her intercessory prayers, implores God's mercy for us sinners. The help of the Most-holy Mother of God has been clearly shown numerous times, to individuals and to nations, in peace and in war, in monastic deserts and in densely populated cities. The event that the Church commemorates and celebrates today confirms the Theotokos' consistent protection of Christian people. On October 1, 911, during the reign of Emperor Leo the Wise, there was an All-night Vigil in the Blachernae Church of the Mother of God in Constantinople. The church was full of people. St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ was standing in the rear of the church with his disciple Epiphanius. At four o'clock in the morning, the Most-holy Theotokos appeared above the people, holding her omophorion outstretched as a protective covering for the faithful. She was clothed in gold-encrusted purple, and shone with an ineffable radiance, surrounded by apostles, saints, martyrs and virgins. St. Andrew said to Blessed Epiphanius: "Do you see, brother, the Queen and Lady of all praying for the whole world?" Epiphanius replied: "I see, Father, and am struck with amazement!" The Feast of the Protection was instituted to commemorate this event, and to remind us that we can prayerfully receive the unceasing protection of the Most-holy Theotokos in any time of difficulty.

2. THE HOLY APOSTLE ANANIAS

Ananias was one of the Seventy Apostles. He was bishop in Damascus. In accordance with to God's revelation (**Acts 9:10-17**), he baptized Saul (the Apostle Paul). Because of his courageous preaching of the Gospel he was stoned to death in the town of Eleutheropolis. His holy relics were taken to Damascus and later to Constantinople.

3. THE VENERABLE ROMANUS THE MELODIST

Romanus was born in the Syrian town of Emesa. He was, at first, a sexton in Beirut, and later served in the cathedral church in Constantinople in the time of Patriarch Euthymius (490-504). Romanus was not well educated and was untrained in chanting, for which he was ridiculed by some of the more educated clergy. St. Romanus tearfully prayed to the Most-holy Theotokos, and she appeared to him in a dream, gave him a scroll, and told him to swallow it. The following day was the Feast of the Nativity. Romanus took his place as a chanter at the ambo, and with an angelic voice sang the hymn "Today the Virgin..." All were amazed at both the content of this hymn and at the magnificent singing of the chanter. Having received the poetic gift from the Theotokos, Romanus composed over a thousand Kontakia. Romanus entered into rest as a deacon of the Great Church, Hagia Sophia, in Constantinople. He joined the angelic choirs in the year 510.

4. THE VENERABLE JOHN KOUKOUZELIS

John was a Slav from Dracha (Dyrrachium). As a young man, he was taken to the school of music in Constantinople, where he became the favorite singer at the imperial court. Fearing the flattery and praise of men, John fled to the Holy Mountain and presented himself at the Great Lavra as a simple shepherd. He lived an exceptional life of asceticism. The Most-holy Theotokos appeared to him on two occasions. He reposed in the twelfth century.

5. THE VENERABLE GREGORY

Gregory was a monk of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos in the fourteenth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE ROMANUS THE MELODIST

**St. Romanus, in mid-service,
Appeared on the ambo
And sang a wondrous hymn
In a sweet angelic voice:**

**"Today, the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One,
And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One.
Angels and Shepherds glorify Him,
And the wise men journey with the star-
For unto us the Eternal God is born
As a little Child."**

**Hearing this hymn,
All were filled with gladness;
And on the faces of all the people
Was great astonishment.**

**Glory to the Mother of God!
Who hearkens to tearful prayers,
And gloriously fulfills
The prayerful supplications of the devout!**

REFLECTION

The Most-holy Theotokos has often appeared to holy men in need: sometimes to encourage them in asceticism, or to heal them from sickness, or to reveal a certain mystery to them. Two similar, wonderful events took place in the Great Lavra on the Holy Mountain. In Great Lent, during the chanting of the Great Akathist, St. John Koukouzelis was tired and sat down, facing the icon of the Theotokos. As he sat, he fell asleep. Just then, the Holy Most-pure One appeared to him in heavenly light and said: "Rejoice, O John! Chant and do not stop chanting, and for this I will not abandon you." With this, she placed a gold coin in John's hand. When he awoke from sleep, the gold coin was still in his hand. After this, many wonderful miracles were worked from the icon of the Theotokos, as well as from the gold coin.

The second incident involved St. Gregory the monk, who, like John Koukouzelis, was a church cantor. Patriarch Kallistos had established that in the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, "All Creation Rejoices in Thee" be sung in place of "It Is Truly Meet." His successor, Patriarch Philotheus, rescinded this, reinstating "It Is Truly Meet" because of its brevity. But then, on the eve of the Theophany, and in the presence of Patriarch Gregory of Alexandria, St. Gregory sang "All Creation Rejoices in Thee" instead. Immediately after this, the Holy Most-pure One appeared to him, and, as she had done to John Koukouzelis, placed a gold coin in his hand. She said: "I am very grateful for your singing in my honor." Because of this, it was instituted that all Liturgies of St. Basil would thereafter include "All Creation Rejoices in Thee."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the injustice of King Ahaz and God's punishments of him (**II Chronicles 28**):

1. How, throughout his life, Ahaz did that which was evil before the Lord;
2. How he set up idols in every corner of Jerusalem and throughout the entire land, and worshiped them;
3. How he waged many wars and was defeated in them all; his land was laid waste; a hundred thousand of his people were slain; and just as many were taken into bondage.

HOMILY

-on the blessed man-

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1).

Brethren, most blessed is he who is not so hardened by sin that he can hear and fulfill this counsel of God that has come through the prophet. The ungodly are those who, in every way, think contrary to God and His will. The sinners are those who walk the path of their own desires, and their thoughts are contrary to the will of God and His law. The scornful are those who destroy themselves and others by their evil deeds. The danger is this: first comes the ungodly counsel (either from wicked men or from sinful thoughts); then the actual committing of sin; then the unrepentant sinner becomes a scandalous example of evil to others. Therefore, blessed is the man who neither heeds the counsel of ungodly men or thoughts, but finds sufficient counsel for his salvation in the Law of God. Blessed is the man who has not even once walked in the way of sinners, or, if he has walked on that path, he has repented and returned to the path of life that is the Lord's. Blessed is the man who has not sat in the presence of the scorner of innocent souls who, by his seductive example, corrupts such souls. For it is said of the corrupter: It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea (**Matthew 18:6**).

O my brethren, blessed be all of you, men and women, who cautiously avoid these three evils: ungodly thoughts and counsels, sinful deeds, and the corrupting of others. These three evils are like one poisonous serpent that grows from a small snake into a giant serpent.

O Blessed Lord our Creator, help us by Thy power and Thy goodness, that we may be saved from the cruel serpent that Thou, O Lord Christ, didst defeat by the weapon of Thine invincible and honorable Cross. Help us to hearken only to Thy counsel, that we may walk only on Thy path, and shine by Thine example.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT ANDREW THE FOOL-FOR-CHRIST

Andrew was a Slav by birth. As a young man, he was enslaved; and was bought by Theognostus, a wealthy man in Constantinople, during the reign of Emperor Leo the Wise (son of Emperor Basil the Macedonian). Andrew was handsome in body and soul. Theognostus took a liking to Andrew, and allowed him to become literate. Andrew fervently prayed to God, and with love attended church services. Obeying a heavenly revelation, he adopted the asceticism of foolishness for Christ. Once, when he went to the well for water, he tore off his clothes, and slashed them with a knife, feigning insanity. Saddened by this, his master Theognostus bound him in chains and brought him to the Church of St. Anastasia the Deliverer from Bonds, so that prayers would be read for him. But Andrew did not improve, and his master freed him as mentally ill. Andrew pretended insanity by day, but prayed to God all night long. He lived without shelter of any kind. He even spent the nights outside, walked around half-naked in a single tattered garment, and ate only a little bread when good men would give it to him. He shared all that he received with the beggars, and would mock them to avoid being thanked by them for holy Andrew wanted all his reward to come from God. Therefore, the great grace of God entered into him and he was able to discern the secrets of men, perceive angels and demons, exorcise demons from men, and correct men from their sins. Andrew had a most beautiful vision of Paradise and the exalted powers of heaven. He also saw the Lord Christ on His throne of glory; and he, with his disciple Epiphanius, saw the Most-holy Theotokos in the Church of Blachernae as she covered the Christian people with her omophorion. This occurrence is celebrated as the Feast of the Protection of the Most-holy Theotokos (October 1). In a vision he also heard ineffable, heavenly words that he dared not repeat to men. After a life of almost unparalleled harshness of asceticism, Andrew entered into rest in the eternal glory of his Lord in 911.

2. THE HIEROMARTYR CYPRIAN AND JUSTINA THE VIRGIN

Cyprian moved from Carthage to Antioch, where Justina lived with her parents, Edesius and Cleodonia. Edesius was a pagan priest, and his entire household was pagan. But when Justina visited a Christian church and learned the true Faith, she converted both her father and mother to the Christian Faith. All three received baptism by Optatus the bishop. Cyprian, however, was a magician, who consorted with impure spirits and practiced sorcery. A certain dissolute pagan youth named Aglaidas was willing to pay any price to charm Justina, for she was beautiful. The holy virgin Justina rejected him adamantly, and he sought help from Cyprian. Cyprian invoked one evil spirit after another, to inflame Justina with impure passion for Aglaidas, but did not succeed. By the sign of the Cross and prayer to God, she drove the evil spirits away. After this futile effort, Cyprian recognized the power of the Cross and was baptized. Eventually, he was made a presbyter, then a bishop. Embittered pagans denounced him and Justina; both were tried in Damascus, tortured, and then beheaded in Nicomedia. They entered into rest at the end of the third century.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS DAVID AND CONSTANTINE

David and Constantine were Christian princes from Argveti (Georgia). They were condemned to death by Caliph Emil-el Mumenim, and were drowned in a river in Imereti in the year 730. Before their death, they prayed to God that He forgive the sins of all who would invoke them in prayer for help. After their prayers were completed, lightning struck, and a voice from heaven said that their prayers had been heard. The saints' relics repose at the Monastery of Motsameta in Georgia.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ANDREW THE FOOL-FOR-CHRIST

Fool-for-Christ Andrew stood at night
Under the starry firmament, praying:
"O Most-high God, three Persons in one Essence,
Salvation and Revival of souls that slumber!
O sweet Jesus, sweeter than life,
Treasury of joy and eternal beauty,
Cleanse the shepherds, enlighten the kings,
Console the troubled and sanctify the whole world.
Do not separate even me, the sinner, Andrew the Fool-for-Christ,
From Thy holy people, O Lord!"
O Saint Andrew, full of God's wisdom,
You who taught the world by words of foolishness-
With the language of the world you spoke to the world,
And by feigned foolishness you glorified Christ.
Men despised you for your foolishness,
And their dogs rose up from their lairs and chased you!
You were God's altar on the rubbish heap of the world.
You censured the world with your prayers-
And the world is not worthy of this marvel.
Glory to you, Andrew, holy Fool-for-Christ!"

REFLECTION

A vision of St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ: A monk in Constantinople was distinguished as an ascetic and spiritual father, and many people came to him for prayers. But this monk had the secret vice of avarice. He collected money and gave it to no one. St. Andrew met him on the street one day, and saw a terrible snake coiled around his neck. St. Andrew took pity on him, approached him, and began to counsel him: "Brother, why have you lost your soul? Why have you bound yourself with the demon of avarice? Why have you given him a resting place within yourself? Why are you amassing gold as though it will go to the grave with you, and not into the hands of others? Why are you strangling yourself by stinginess? While others hunger and thirst and perish from cold, you rejoice looking at your heap of gold! Is this the path of repentance? Is this the monastic rank? Do you see your demon?" At that, the spiritual eyes of the monk were opened, and he saw the dark demon and was greatly horrified. The demon dropped away from the monk and fled, driven by Andrew's power. Then a most radiant angel of God appeared to the monk, for his heart was changed for the good. Immediately, he went about distributing his hoarded gold to the poor and needy. From then on, he pleased God in everything and was more greatly glorified than before.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness of Hezekiah, and God's reward to him (**II Chronicles 30, 31**):

1. How Hezekiah did that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God (**II Chronicles 31:20**);
2. How he restored holiness to the Temple of the Lord, and rooted out idols and idol-worshiping among the people;
3. How God had mercy on him, and he was prosperous in everything.

HOMILY

-on the will of the righteous in the will of God-

But his delight is in the Law of the Lord and on His Law doth he meditate day and night (Psalm 1:2).

Brethren, blessed is that man-thrice blessed is he-whose will is submitted to the will of God; whose mind thinks of nothing contrary to the counsel of God; and whose heart desires nothing contrary to the will of God. The mind is the rudder of both the will and the heart. If the mind is permanently directed toward God, then it will eagerly meditate day and night on the Law of God, and will not walk in the counsel of the ungodly (**Psalm 1:1**) but will seek the truth and the revelation of all that is in God's Law. If the mind is so directed to God, then, swiftly, the heart and will of man will also be directed toward God. Then the will, as the implementing organ of the inner man, will carry out only what is in accordance with the will of God and what is written in the Law of God. Then man will not stand in the way of the sinners (**Psalm 1:1**), and will not sit in the seat of the scornful (**Psalm 1:1**); he will not commit sin, nor will he draw other men to sin. At the beginning of this Psalm, the Prophet David praises the man who does not commit three specific evils, and now he continues to praise him when he does two good things. The three evils are: to seek wisdom of a sinner, to live the life of a sinner and to corrupt others by one's evil example. The two good things are: to conform one's will completely to the Law of God; and to direct one's mind to meditate day and night on God's Law.

O my brethren, how lamentably shallow are the minds of all those who do not know the Law of God! The depth of man's mind is measured by the depth of his knowledge of God's law. The mind of him who meditates on the mysteries of God's law is deep, wide and exalted; and the mind is the rudder of the heart and will. O my brethren, how shallow, unstable and dissolute is the will of him who does not subordinate his will to the will of God! Indeed, it is lamentably shallow, unstable and dissolute. What is the Law of God, brethren? It is the expression of God's will. Where is that expression to be found? In Holy Scripture and in the Tradition of the saints of the Church of God. Blessed is he who knows the will of God and fulfills it.

O Lord God, great and powerful, merciful and just; enlighten our minds by Thy holy law, so that we may conform our wills to Thy man-loving and saving will.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

OCTOBER - 3 -

1. THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

Dionysius is numbered among the Seventy Lesser Apostles. This wonderful man was the scion of a distinguished pagan family in Athens. Having completed the school of philosophy in Athens, he went to Egypt to study further. While he was there the Lord Christ died on the Cross, the sun was darkened, and there was darkness in Egypt for three hours. Then Dionysius cried out: "Either God the Creator of the world is suffering, or this world is coming to an end." Returning to Athens, he married a woman named Damaris and had sons by her. He became a member of the highest court among the Greeks, the Areopagus, and thereafter he was known as the "Areopagite." When the Apostle Paul preached the Gospel in Athens, Dionysius was baptized with his entire household. Paul consecrated him Bishop of Athens. He left his wife, children and his position for the love of Christ. He traveled with Paul for a long time and met all the other apostles of Christ. He traveled to Jerusalem especially to see the Most-holy Theotokos, and described his encounter with her in one of his written works. He was present at the burial of the Holy and Most-pure One. When his teacher, St. Paul, suffered martyrdom, Dionysius also desired such a death for himself, and went to Gaul, with his presbyter Rusticus and the deacon Eleutherius, to preach the Gospel among the barbarians. He suffered much but also succeeded much. By his labors many pagans were converted to the Christian Faith. Dionysius built a small church in Paris, where he celebrated the divine services. When he was ninety years old, he, Rusticus and Eleutherius were seized and tortured for Christ; then all three were beheaded. The severed head of St. Dionysius rolled a long distance, to the feet of Catula, a Christian, who honorably buried it with his body. Dionysius suffered during the reign of Dometian in the year 96. He wrote several famous works: on the Divine Names of God, on the Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies, on Mystical Theology, and on the Most-holy Theotokos.

2. THE VENERABLE JOHN THE CHOZEBITE

John was an Egyptian who lived the ascetic life in the Chozeba community during the reign of Emperor Justinian. Whenever he celebrated the Liturgy, he perceived a heavenly radiance in the sanctuary. Ananias, an elder, labored ascetically not far from him. Wondrous was the humility of these two saints. A man brought his insane son to the elder Ananias to heal him by prayer. Ananias sent him to St. John as being greater than he. John could not help but obey the elder; however, he cried out: "In the name of Jesus Christ, it is Ananias, not I, who commands you to come out of this young man!" And the young man was healed immediately.

3. THE VENERABLE DIONYSIUS OF THE MONASTERY OF THE KIEV CAVES

Dionysius was a hieromonk and a recluse. The following incident occurred to him on the Feast of the Resurrection in 1463. With a cross and censor, Dionysius visited the caves in order to cense the relics and graves of the saints reposing there. Filled with the joy of the Resurrection, as he approached the caves, he cried out: "Holy fathers and brethren-Christ is Risen!" And a voice resounded from the graves as powerful as thunder: "Indeed, He is Risen!"

4. SAINT HESYCHIUS THE CHOREBITE

At first, Hesychius was negligent about his soul's salvation, but then he became gravely ill and died. However, he came back from the dead and regained health. This completely changed him. He shut himself up in a cell on the Holy Mountain, and spoke to no one for twelve years. Before his death, the monks opened his cell and begged him to give them some instruction. He said only: "He who contemplates death cannot sin." From Hesychius descended the so-called hesychasts, who stress silence, divine contemplation, and mental prayer as the chief works of a true monk. There was even a hesychast skete on the Holy Mountain. It is said that St. Gregory the Theologian was a hesychast during the Lenten season. St. Hesychius lived in the sixth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE

Glorious saint Dionysius,
Wondrous theologian and lucid scribe!
His mind, gathered in his heart, he directed to God;
He witnessed heavenly mysteries and revealed them to us.
He perceived the glory of the heavenly orders
And described the hierarchy of heaven:
Principalities, Dominions, Virtues, Powers,
Wondrous Thrones, Seraphim,
Cherubim and Archangels,
Golden-winged Angels of God,
And the Mother of God.-
He beheld all with fear,
And also that which shines above the dust of the earth:
Heavenly powers of infinite strength,
Immortal suns and stars most brilliant!
All that he witnessed, Dionysius made clear
And told to the Church.
Thus he adorned and enriched the Church,
And his accomplishments were made golden
By his bloody death for his Christ.
Now he shines in heaven;
And the angelic hosts, blazing with the glory of God,
Call Dionysius "Brother."

REFLECTION

A vision of St. Andrew: Walking one day along the streets of Constantinople, St. Andrew saw a large, splendid procession. A rich man had just died, and his funeral procession was majestic. However, when Andrew looked more closely, he saw many black figures capering around the corpse with joy: some laughing like prostitutes, others barking like dogs, others grunting like swine, and others pouring a foul liquid over the body of the deceased. They all mocked the processional chanters, saying: ``You are chanting over a dog!" Astonished, Andrew wondered what this man had done in his life. Glancing around, he saw a handsome youth standing by a wall and weeping. ``For the sake of the God of heaven and earth, tell me the reason for your weeping!" he said, and the youth replied that he was the guardian angel of the deceased. The dead man had grievously offended God by his sins, and had rejected the counsels of his angel. He had completely given himself over to the black devils. The angel said that that man had been a great and unrepentant sinner: he had been a liar, a despiser of men, a miser, a perjurer and a libertine, who had defiled three hundred souls by his debauchery. He had been honored by the emperor and respected by men, but all in vain. The great funeral retinue was also in vain. Death had caught up with the rich man in his unrepentant state, and the harvest had come to him suddenly.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrians (**II Chronicles 32**):

1. How Sennacherib and his mighty army surrounded the walls of Jerusalem and mocked the God of Israel;
2. How Hezekiah and the Prophet Isaiah fervently prayed to God for deliverance;
3. How an angel slew 185,000 Assyrians by night; how Sennacherib was slain by his sons; and how Jerusalem was saved.

HOMILY

-on fear and joy in God-

Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in Him with trembling (Psalm 2:11).

The prophet of God speaks these words to earthly kings and judges, for they are inclined to pride and lasciviousness born out of the power and riches that are given to them. O you kings and judges-clods of dust beneath the feet of God-do not forget that you are only the servants of God, hirelings from today until tomorrow! Of what does a hireling think, digging in the field all day? About the pay that he will receive in the evening. Of what is the hireling proud? Not of his labor, but rather his pay. In what does the hireling rejoice? In his labor, his sweat, or his pay? Naturally, in his pay. O kings and judges, your service in the field of this life is the labor of a hireling. Therefore, with fear serve your Lord, who hired you: for you know not how your Lord will evaluate your labor in the end, or what pay He will render unto you. Serve with great humility, saying to yourself: **We are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10)**. Whether you will receive a reward or punishment when you go down into the grave and come before the King and Judge is uncertain. Therefore, fear must fill all the days of your service.

Rejoice in Him with trembling. Rejoice with a pure and holy joy, as the angels rejoice in the living and unapproachable God. The joy of Paradise is fragrant with purity and sanctity; but the malicious joy of hades is accompanied by rebellious laughter. Therefore the joy of Paradise is eternal, while the laughter of hades is turned to rage and groans.

Serve with fear, for the Lord is just; rejoice with trembling, for the Lord is exalted and holy. O Lord our God-just and exalted, awesome and holy-all of our life on earth is service to Thee and joy in Thee. If we do not serve Thee, we serve our own destruction; and if we do not rejoice in Thee, we rejoice in our own evil works. We worship Thee and pray Thee to help us, that our service be directed by fear of Thee, and that our joy be purified by our trembling before Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HIEROMARTYR HIEROTHEUS

Hierotheus was a companion of St. Dionysius the Areopagite and received the Christian Faith from the Apostle Paul a short time after Dionysius did. Later, the Apostle appointed him bishop of Athens. At the time of the Dormition of the Most-holy Theotokos, Hierotheus arrived in Jerusalem and took part in her burial. With his divine chanting he inspired heartfelt worship in many, revealing himself as a man inspired from on high. He labored much in the work of evangelism, converted many pagans to the truth and governed well his rational flock. He finally died a martyr for Christ, Who granted him a twofold crown in His Heavenly Kingdom: the crown of a hierarch and the crown of a martyr.

2. SAINT STEFAN SHTILJANOVICH

Stefan was a Serbian despot, born of the Pastrovich clan. He governed the Serbian people during a most difficult period, struggling courageously against the Turks and the Latins. A righteous man and a patriot, this wonderful prince could be compared with St. Alexander Nevsky, or with the holy King Jovan Vladimir. He entered into rest in the sixteenth century (according to some, in 1515). Over his grave a light appeared at night, by which means his holy relics were discovered. They were brought to the Monastery of Shishatovac in Frushka Gora, where they repose for a long time. During the Second World War, St. Stefan's relics were transported to Belgrade and placed in the Cathedral Church beside the body of Prince Lazar. The prince's wife, Helena, seeing Stefan's incorrupt relics and witnessing miracles arising from the relics, was tonsured a nun, and gave herself over to asceticism until death.

3. THE VENERABLE AMMON

Ammon was an Egyptian wine grower. His kinsmen forced him to marry against his will, but he did not wish to live with the woman as husband and wife. From the first day he called her his sister, and counseled her to join him in preserving their mutual chastity for the sake of the greater good in heaven. He lived with his wife this way for a full eighteen years. Later, by mutual agreement, his wife established a convent in her home, and Ammon went to the Nitrian desert, where he gave himself up to the ascetic life. Because of his purity of heart, God granted him the great gifts of clairvoyance and miracle-working. A husband and wife brought their insane son to Ammon for healing by his prayer, but Ammon in no way desired to do this. After prolonged insistence by the parents, Ammon said: "The illness and health of your child is in your hands. Return the stolen ox to that widow (and he spoke her name) and your son will be healed." The parents, amazed at the saint's clairvoyance, admitted their sin and promised to return the stolen ox as soon as they arrived home. Then St. Ammon prayed to God and the child was healed. Ammon was a close friend of St. Anthony the Great. When Ammon died in Nitria, in approximately 350, St. Anthony saw Ammon's soul in the heights from his cell and said to the brethren: "Today Abba Ammon died; behold, I see his holy soul as the angels bear it to heaven."

4. THE VENERABLE PAUL THE SIMPLE

Until the age of sixty, Paul lived in the world as a married man. Catching his wife in sin, he left everything and went to St. Anthony in the wilderness, receiving the monastic tonsure from him. Even though he was simple and illiterate, he achieved such spiritual perfection that he perceived every man's soul just as ordinary men see each other's bodies. He was a great miracle-worker, and in some instances, surpassed even St. Anthony. Paul died in deep old age in the year 340, and took up his joyful habitation with the angels.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE AMMON

Someone once begged Ammon:

"Show me, the wretched one, the path to salvation."

To him, the saint said: "Through your entire life

You must be as a prisoner who awaits judgment,

As the prisoner who fears the judge,

And counts the hours to his trial,

Listening carefully for the voice that will say:

"The judge is calling for you!"

He does not value food and shelter,

Cares not whether he stands or sits:

He simply listens and listens

For the call of the judge.

My dear brother, we are like that-

It is true for me, and it is true for you."

And another asked him: "The narrow path, what is it?

And the sorrowful path, how long does it last?"

Ammon said to him: "The narrow path is

Constraining your thoughts, so that they do not stray.

The sorrowful path is the binding of your desires,

So that your desire is naught but seeking salvation in Christ."

O all-wise Ammon, knight of asceticism;

Patient bearer of the yoke of Christ

Who pleased God, and tamed men-

God has rewarded your labors with Paradise!

REFLECTION

A vision of St. Andrew: St. Paul was not the only one who was **caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words (II Corinthians 12:4)**. Over 850 years after St. Paul, this also occurred to St. Andrew. One wintry night, St. Andrew was lying among the dogs on a dung heap in order to warm his frozen body, when an angel of God appeared to him and raised him up to Paradise (whether in the body or outside the body, St. Andrew himself could not explain), and kept him in the heavenly world for two weeks, eventually leading him to the third heaven. "I saw myself clothed in the most dazzling garments-they were as if woven from lightning-with a wreath of flowers on my head, and girt with a royal girdle. I rejoiced greatly at this beauty, and was amazed in both mind and heart, at the inexpressible beauty of God's Paradise, as I walked around it and rejoiced." Andrew also wrote that he saw Christ the Lord: "And when a flaming hand drew the curtain, I saw my Lord-as once did the Prophet Isaiah-sitting upon a high and exalted throne, with Seraphim standing all around Him. He was clothed in a crimson garment. His face was most radiant, and His eyes gazed most kindly upon me. Seeing Him, I prostrated before Him, worshiping the brilliant and awesome throne of His glory. How much joy overcame me during the vision of His face cannot be expressed; and now, calling to mind this vision, I am filled with inexpressible joy.... I heard my Most-merciful Creator when, with His most sweet and pure lips, He spoke three words to me, which so sweetened my heart and inflamed it with love for Him, that I melted as warm wax from spiritual warmth...." When St. Andrew also desired to see the Most-holy Theotokos, he was told that she was not in heaven just then, but had descended to earth to help the poor and to comfort those in need.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the injustice of King Manasseh and God's punishment (**II Chronicles 33**):

1. How Manasseh restored idol worship, enchantments and witchcraft, and did everything that is evil in the sight of the Lord;
2. How God permitted the Chaldeans to capture Manasseh.

HOMILY

-on useful anger-

Be angry and sin not (Psalm 4:4).

Be angry with yourself, brethren, and sin no more. Be angry at your sins of thoughts and deeds, and sin no more. Be angry with Satan **the father of lies (John 8:44)**, and no longer do his will. Be angry at sin in the world and the trampling of God's holy Church by godless men, but beware that you do not cure sin by sin. Be angry with your friends when they sin; but be angry with the intention to correct them, and not to embitter them even more. The anger of a friend toward a friend, and the anger of parents toward their children-and of God toward men-is not a storm that uproots the tree but a wind that strengthens the tree, and rids it of rotten fruit so that the healthy fruit will increase in number and beauty. But let your anger have measure, so that it may be healing and not poisonous. In order to have this kind of control, keep God before you in your anger. There is no stronger containment for anger than God. All anger that is not in the name of God and God's righteousness is a sin. Do not become angry for the sake of idleness, but become angry for that at which God is angered. If your will is firmly set in God's law, you will always know when it is necessary to be angry, and how much is needed. This cannot be expressed entirely in words, nor can it even be explained to the uneducated. Anger, in its place, acts as mercy does in its place. O my brethren, do you see how various powers are placed in our souls, and man, by his free will, can utilize them for life or death? Anger toward oneself can never be recommended enough. Here is a wonderful example: the more a man learns to be angry with himself, the less he is angry with others. Carried away with anger at his own weaknesses, he either does not see the weaknesses of others, or when he does see them, he judges them kindly.

O Lord God, Thou only righteous One, implant in us the remembrance of the Day of Thy righteous anger, so that we may protect ourselves from spiritual sin.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR CHARITINA

Having been orphaned in infancy, Charitina was adopted by an eminent Christian man named Claudius, who raised her as his own daughter. Charitina was meek, humble, obedient and quiet. She studied the Law of God day and night, and vowed to live her life in chastity, as a true bride of Christ. Since Charitina also brought others to the Christian Faith, Dometius, Emperor Diocletian's eparch, heard of her, sent soldiers to take her from her foster father, and brought her to trial. The judge questioned her: "Is it true, young maiden, that you are a Christian, and that you deceive others, leading them to this profane Faith?" Charitina courageously replied: "It is true that I am a Christian, but it is a lie that I deceive others; rather, I lead those in error to the true path, by leading them to my Christ." The evil judge condemned her. Her hair was shorn and hot coals were poured onto her head. Even so, she was saved by the power of God. They threw her into the sea, but God delivered her again. They tied her to a wheel and began to turn it, but an angel of God stopped the wheel, and Charitina remained unharmed. Then the depraved judge sent some dissolute young men to defile her. Fearing this dishonor, St. Charitina prayed to God to receive her soul before those degenerates could defile her virginal body. While she knelt, praying to God, her soul departed from her and was translated to the Immortal Kingdom of Christ.

2. THE HIEROMARTYR DIONYSIUS, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

Dionysius was born in Alexandria of eminent pagan parents. He was educated in Greek philosophy, and then studied with Origen. As a young man, he read the epistles of the Apostle Paul, came to believe in Christ and was baptized by Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria. In the year 247, Dionysius became Bishop of Alexandria, and served God and God's people as a true shepherd under very difficult circumstances. Externally, the Church was persecuted by pagans, while from within it was rent by heretics. In addition, a plague decimated the population for several years. Dionysius lived, hidden by the faithful, outside Alexandria for three years so as not to be slain before his time. During those three years, he wrote many epistles and other compositions to his flock, instructing and encouraging them to uphold Orthodoxy. Among his writings are several canons that the Church adopted. His epistle against Novatian is also considered a canonical writing. He governed the Church for seventeen years, and reposed in the year 265.

3. THE VENERABLE EUDOCIMUS OF VATOPEDI

In the year 1841, when the ossuary at Vatopedi was being restored, the workmen found the relics of a man in a kneeling posture. He had an icon of the Most-holy Theotokos in his hands, resting on his bosom. A wondrous fragrance exuded from these relics. Not knowing who this holy man was or when he lived, the monks gave him the name Eudocimus, and transferred his relics into the church, where they remain today. Many miracles of healing have occurred over these relics. Even now, one can read these words, carved on his silver coffin: "This coffin was made for the honorable head of St. Eudocimus by the monk Gabriel, whom this saint healed from a grave illness."

4. THE VENERABLE DAMIAN, JEREMIAH AND MATTHEW

They were clairvoyants and miracle-workers of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves. They all lived in the eleventh century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR CHARITINA

Tortured Charitina, covered with blood,
Prayed on her knees to the Most-high God:
"O Most High, All Merciful-my Creator-
Among Thy martyrs, number me also!
Sweet Christ, Thou didst suffer on the Cross for me,
And now for Thee I desire to suffer.
Be near to Thy virgin, O Savior,
And protect me, lest the evil ones defile me.
Better that they burn my body with cruel fire,
Better that they drown it in the azure sea,
Than that they profane it by a shameful deed,
Before the heavenly angels and the righteous saints."
The Lord did according to Charitina's prayer,
And immediately received her soul into Paradise.

REFLECTION

Whenever men exert great effort in seeking the truth, and prefer nothing else to the truth, God comes to meet them in His gentle way. This is shown to us in the life of St. Dionysius of Alexandria. Even as a young man and a pagan, Dionysius read all the Greek literature, seeking the truth. When he was not satisfied with this, he read everything that came into his hands. And, in accord with God's providence, he met a poor woman who offered to sell him several hand-copied epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul. Dionysius gladly purchased and read them. They so overcame him that he sought out this woman and asked her if there were more such writings to be had. The woman directed him to a Christian priest who gave him all of Paul's epistles. Having read all carefully, Dionysius came to believe in Christ, and was baptized without any hesitation.

Here is another incident: In the town of Arsinoe, the Millenarian heresy had spread. This heresy taught that Christ would soon come, and He would establish an earthly kingdom on earth for a thousand years. At the head of this heresy was a certain Korakion. St. Dionysius went to Arsinoe to change the minds of the millenarians and to prevent the spread of this heresy. At a large gathering of millenarians and true Orthodox, Dionysius debated with Korakion and other leaders of the millenarians. This debate lasted for three whole days. (Such zeal did the ancient Christians show in the examination of the truth!) God blessed their labor and zeal, through the prayers of St. Dionysius. At the end of the debate, Korakion and all the other millenarians rejected their false teaching and accepted the Orthodox teaching of St. Dionysius.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the repentance of King Manasseh and God's forgiveness of him (**II Chronicles 33**):

1. How Manasseh, living as a slave in a foreign land, recognized his sin, repented, and prayed to God for forgiveness;
2. How God forgave him, and freed him from bondage;
3. How, after that, Manasseh did that which is good in the sight of the Lord unto the day of his death, and reigned peacefully.

HOMILY

-on the good that is shown-

There be many who say, Who will show us any good? (Psalm 4:6).

My brethren, great is God's goodness. What words can express that goodness? Great is the goodness of the Heavenly Kingdom with its fiery angels, wonderful saints, and the sweetness of Paradise. Who can describe this goodness? Immortal life, close to God and the angels of God, in the company of the saints and the righteous, is a great good. Another great good will be our meeting with our kinsmen and friends in the heavenly world; with our parents, our children, and our most beloved ones, who by their departure left us in sadness and grief. Who will show us all that good? Many asked this in King David's time, and many ask even today. Who will show it to us, so that we may believe and hope?

That good is shown to us Christians, and we wait for nothing higher, for no one but the Lord Christ-the true Witness to all this good, the true Witness and Lord, brethren, of all this good. The compassionate Lord showed this good to His chosen prophets even before His coming to earth. That is why David says to God: **Lord, lift up the light of Thy countenance upon us (Psalms 4:6).**

This is the reply to those who ask: **Who will show us any good?** God Himself showed us that good. The light of the Lord's countenance is marked upon us, inscribed and etched in our hearts, and in that light we recognize that good which only heaven can give. Brethren, is there a cure for those who have heard about the coming of Christ on earth, but nevertheless asked: **Who will show us any good?** If Christ had not shown and revealed all that is good by His glorious birth, His glorious miracles, His glorious Resurrection, and His Holy Church, the dark earth would not show it, for it cannot; men would not show it, for they do not know. However, there is a cure for everyone-even for the most incorrigible unbelievers-up to the moment of death. This cure is in repentance of one's evil, in the cleansing of one's heart, and in the fulfilling of Christ's commandments. The healthy can see the light of the countenance of the Lord; but not the sick in soul, the impure in heart or the wrong-minded.

O our Lord God, light of angels and men; help us that we not darken the light that Thou hast given us-and by which we see the heavenly good-by the darkness of our sin. Do not deprive us of these good things, O Most-merciful One.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE THOMAS

Thomas was one of the Twelve Apostles. Through his doubt in the Resurrection of Christ the Lord, a new proof was given of that wonderful and saving event. The resurrected Lord appeared to His disciples a second time, in order to convince Thomas. The Lord said to Thomas: **Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.** And Thomas replied: **My Lord and my God (John 20:27-28).** After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the apostles cast lots to see where they would each go to preach, the lot fell to Thomas to go to India. He was a little saddened that he had to go so far away, but the Lord appeared to him and encouraged him. In India, St. Thomas converted many, both aristocrats and poor, to the Christian Faith, and established the Church there, appointing priests and bishops. Among others, Thomas converted two sisters to the Faith-Tertiana and Migdonia-both wives of Indian princes. Because of their faith, both sisters were ill-treated by their husbands, with whom they no longer wanted to live after their baptism. Eventually, they were allowed to go. Being freed of marriage, they lived God-pleasing lives until their repose. Dionysius and Pelagia were betrothed, but when they heard the apostolic preaching they did not marry, but devoted themselves to the ascetic life. Pelagia ended her life as a martyr for the Faith, and Dionysius was ordained a bishop by the apostle. Prince Mazdai, Tertiana's husband, whose son, Azan, was also baptized by Thomas, condemned the apostle to death. Mazdai sent five soldiers to kill Thomas. They ran him through with their five spears, and thus the Holy Apostle Thomas rendered his soul into the hands of Christ. Before his death, he and the other apostles were miraculously brought to Jerusalem for the burial of the Most-holy Theotokos. Arriving too late, he wept bitterly, and the tomb of the Holy Most-pure One was opened at his request. The Theotokos' body was not found in the tomb: the Lord had taken His Mother to His heavenly habitation. Thus, in his tardiness St. Thomas revealed to us the wondrous glorification of the Mother of God, just as he had once confirmed faith in the Resurrection of the Lord by his unbelief.

2. THE VENERABLE NEW MARTYR MACARIUS

Macarius was born in the town of Kios, in Bithynia. His parents, Peter and Anthusa, were Christians, and he was baptized with the name of Manuel. In his youth, he was sent to learn tailoring as a trade. In the meantime, his father embraced Islam and moved to Brussa. There came a time when Manuel came to Brussa on business, and his father found him and exerted great pressure on him to become a Moslem. Manuel resisted in vain: the Turks circumcised him by force. Manuel then fled to the Holy Mountain and was tonsured a monk in the Skete of St. Anna. His monastic name was Macarius. For twelve years he was an excellent monk, but he never had peace of soul. **Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven (Matthew 10:33)**-Christ's words continually echoed in Macarius's mind. Finally, with the blessing of his elder, he went to Brussa and openly confessed his Faith in Christ before the Turks, calling Mohammed a false prophet. After being flogged for 130 days and enduring other harsh tortures, he was beheaded there, on October 6, 1590. A part of his miracle-working relics is preserved in the Skete of St. Anna on Mount Athos.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE THOMAS

The Apostle Thomas, by his unbelief,
Strengthened his faith: the Lord appeared to him.
Thomas witnessed Him and rejoiced,
And joyfully glorified Christ.
India became Thomas's vineyard,
And he cultivated that land with the Cross:
Preaching Christ to the mighty and the lowly,
Preaching His wisdom and His works.

O wise sons of India,
Your wisdom is but a snake in the grass.
Lo, true Wisdom has descended from heaven for you-
The Wisdom of God has appeared in the flesh!

Thomas spoke and worked miracles,
And a multitude of people followed him,
In hearing his wisdom, and beholding the wonders
That Thomas worked in the name of the Lord.

Thomas endured great torments,
But shattered the gates of the darkness of idolatry,
And suffered, like Christ, five cruel wounds,
Which he received in his body for the sake of the truth.

Five bitter wounds, for the number of the senses-
Which is a lesson in mystical wisdom:
He who subdues not all his senses
Will taste of no spiritual sweetness.

REFLECTION

We have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (II Corinthians 5:1), says the discerning Apostle Paul. All our efforts for God on earth have this purpose: to merit, according to our power, this eternal house in the heavens not made by hands. The Indian King Gundafor decided to build himself a magnificent palace, unlike any other on earth. When Abban, his envoy, sought a skilled craftsman to build the king's palace, he met the Apostle Thomas by God's providence. St. Thomas told him that he was a craftsman, and that no one else could build what the king wanted. Thomas therefore received much gold from the king for the building of this palace. As soon as he departed from the king, he distributed all the gold to the poor. The palace site was some distance from the king's capital, and after two years the king sent servants to ask Thomas if the palace was completed. Thomas replied: "Everything is ready except the roof," and he sought more money from the king; and the king gave it to him. Again, Thomas distributed it all to the poor, and went throughout the kingdom doing his work, preaching the Gospel. The king, learning that Thomas had not even begun to build the palace, seized him and threw him into prison. That night, the king's brother died, and the king fell into great sorrow. An angel took the soul of the deceased and, leading him through Paradise, showed him a magnificent palace, such as the mind of man could not imagine. The soul of the deceased wished to enter that palace, but the angel told him that he could not, for it was his brother's palace, which the Apostle Thomas had built with his alms. Then the angel returned the brother's soul to his body. When he came to himself, he said to the king: "Swear to me that you will give me anything I ask." And the king swore. Then the brother said: "Give me the palace that you have in the heavens." The king was amazed that he had a palace in the heavens. When the brother described everything in detail, the king believed and immediately released Thomas from prison. Then, when he heard the apostle's preaching of salvation and eternal life, the king and his brother were baptized. King Gundafor undertook new works of charity, and built an even more magnificent palace in the heavens for himself.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the injustice of King Amon and God's punishment of him (**II Chronicles 33**):

1. How Amon, the son of Manasseh, turned from God and did that which is evil in the sight of the Lord;
2. How he reigned for only two years, and was slain by his servants.

HOMILY

-on the king's repentance-

I am weary with my groaning; all night I wash my bed; I water my couch with my tears (Psalms 6:6).

Day replaces night, and night replaces day. Let our daily repentance be succeeded by nightly repentance, and our nightly repentance by daily repentance. Daily repentance is shown primarily in good works; and nightly repentance in prayer, sighing and weeping. Thus, we repay our debt both day and night, by filling them with that which is most worthwhile before the Lord, and that which will go with us to the Judgment of God. Look at King David and behold an example of true repentance. It is not enough to confess one's sin before a priest and consider it forgiven. Behold, even David acknowledged his sin before the Prophet Nathan, saying: **I have sinned against the Lord (II Samuel 12:13)**. However, the great king did not consider this enough, but continually sighed in prayer before God, and washed away his sin every night with tears of repentance. Even lying in bed did not serve as rest for him, but as exhaustion from tearful repentance and tearful sighing. Do not say: "David committed murder and adultery, and therefore he had much to repent for." Do you not kill men by your hatred, and commit adultery by your impure thoughts and desires? Brethren, this life is not to justify ourselves but to condemn ourselves. Blessed is he whom God will justify at the Dread Judgment.

Repentance is not a matter for one hour or for one day. Repentance should be our inner occupation to the end of life. **All night I water my couch**, said King David. That does not mean that there is no need for repentance during the day, but that the outpouring of spiritual repentance is more suited to the night than the day. In the stillness of the night, both our sins and God's judgment come more clearly into focus. Doesn't the night remind us more clearly of death than the day? Doesn't the bed remind us of the nearness of the grave?

O Lord, just and wonderful, truly we cannot repent without Thy help. Help us, O All-good One, that we might see our sinful wounds, and smell the stench from them, and weep over ourselves-before our kinsmen begin to weep over our dead bodies, and before our guardian angels begin to weep over the carrion of our souls, when they are cast into the unquenchable fire. Help us and save us, O our God.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS SERGIUS AND BACCHUS

These holy and wonderful martyrs and heroes of the Christian Faith were at first noblemen at the court of Emperor Maximian. The emperor himself esteemed them greatly because of their courage, wisdom and fidelity. But when the emperor heard that his two noblemen were Christians, his love for them turned into rage. Once, when there was a great sacrificial offering to idols, the emperor demanded that Sergius and Bacchus offer sacrifices with him, but they openly refused to obey the emperor in this. Beside himself with rage, the emperor commanded that their military garments, rings and emblems be stripped from them and that they be dressed in women's clothing. He then placed iron hoops around their necks and paraded them through the streets of the city of Rome, to be mocked by everyone. Afterward, he sent them to Antiochus, his deputy in Asia, for torture. Antiochus had risen to his position with Sergius and Bacchus's help, as they had at one time recommended him to the emperor. When Antiochus implored them to deny Christ and save themselves from dishonorable suffering and death, these saints replied: ``Both honor and dishonor, both life and death-all are the same to him who seeks the Heavenly Kingdom." Antiochus cast Sergius into prison and ordered that Bacchus be tortured first. His minions took turns beating the holy Bacchus until his whole body was broken. Bacchus's holy soul departed his broken and bloodied body, and in the hands of angels was borne to the Lord. St. Bacchus suffered in the town of Barbalissos. Then St. Sergius was led out and shod in iron shoes with inward-protruding nails. He was driven, on foot, to the town of Rozapha, in Syria, and was beheaded there with the sword. His soul went to Paradise where, together with his friend Bacchus, he received a crown of immortal glory from Christ, his King and Lord. These two wondrous knights of the Christian Faith suffered in about the year 303.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR POLYCHRONIUS

Polychronius was born in the district of Gamphanitus, of peasant parents. As a young man, he worked as a day-laborer in the vineyard of a certain Constantinopolitan. But even as a day-laborer Polychronius devoted himself to the ascetic life of prayer and fasting day and night. Seeing his life, angelic in its purity and abstinence, the vintner was amazed, and gave him much more money than he earned. St. Polychronius took the money and built a church. At the time of the Nicaean Council (325), Polychronius was a church reader. He showed such zeal in the defense of Orthodoxy against the Arians that he was ordained a priest. Later, these evil heretics sought revenge, and attacked St. Polychronius inside the church itself, and chopped him into pieces. Thus, this great defender of the truth and purity of Orthodoxy suffered and received a wreath of glory from his Most-glorious Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS SERGIUS AND BACCHUS

The royal men, Sergius and Bacchus
Served the King, but not the earthly one-
Rather, Jesus, the Immortal King.
The earthly king mocked the saints
And removed the belts from their waists,
But the Lord girded them with strength.
The emperor removed their noblemen's togas,
But the Savior clothed them more beautifully
In an incorrupt garment of immortality;
The emperor removed their rings from their right hands,
But the Lord gave them far more glorious ones,
In betrothing their souls to Himself.
The emperor banished them from his court,
But God welcomed them into the heavenly courts.
The earth tortured these knights of Christ,
The earth tortured them, but heaven gave them repose.
Decay rejects purity,
Evil rejects goodness,
But Saints Bacchus and Sergius
Returned all earthliness to the earth,
And gave their holy souls over to God!
Though exiled from the earthly kingdom,
They illumine the earth even now;
By their suffering, they conquered malice;
By their death for the Cross, they are glorified.
As victors over the powers of darkness,
They show us the path to victory.

REFLECTION

A vision of St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ: Once, St. Andrew was sitting with his disciple Epiphanius, talking about the salvation of the soul. Just then, a demon approached Epiphanius and began setting traps to distract his thoughts, but did not dare to approach Andrew. Andrew cried out: "Depart from here, impure adversary!" The devil drew back and replied maliciously: "You are my adversary, such as no other in all of Constantinople!" Andrew did not drive him away immediately, but permitted him to speak. And the devil began: "I feel that the time is coming when my work will be finished. At that time, men will be worse than I, as children will be even more wicked than adults. Then I will rest and will not teach men anything anymore, since they themselves will carry out my will in everything." Andrew asked him: "In what sins do your kind rejoice the most?" The devil replied: "The service of idols, slander, malice against one's neighbor, the sodomite sin, drunkenness and avarice-in this we rejoice the most." Andrew further asked him: "And how do you tolerate it when someone who first served you rejects you and your works?" The devil replied: "You know that better than I do; we find it difficult to tolerate, but we are comforted by this: we will probably bring them back to us-for many who have rejected us and turned to God have come back to us again." After the evil spirit had said this and much more, St. Andrew breathed on him and he disappeared.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness of King Josiah, and God's reward to him (**II Chronicles 34**):

1. How King Josiah rooted out the idols, and did all that which is good in the sight of the Lord;
2. How God's blessing was poured out upon him and his people during his long reign.

HOMILY

-on children and their praise of the Lord-

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained strength, because of Thine enemies (Psalm 8:2).

At the glorious Entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem, and even in the Temple itself, the children cried out: **Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! (Matthew 21:9).** It seems that nothing irritated the Jewish elders so much as this praising of Jesus by young children. **Hearest thou what these say? (Matthew 21:16),** they asked Him maliciously. And Jesus answered them meekly: **Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? (Matthew 21:16).** Thus, it is as clear as day that these prophetic words of David pertain to the wonder that occurred at the Entry of the Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem: this wondrous praising of the Lord by little children. It is obvious that, as this event was prophesied, so it was literally fulfilled. It is also obvious from this that the Lord Himself was then referring to that prophecy of King David: **Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise.** There can be no doubt that it was a great wonder, inspired by the Spirit of God and carried out by the power and will of God. While the princes, scribes, elders and priests were not able to recognize Christ the Lord, the little children both recognized and proclaimed Him! In truth, this is a miracle, unique throughout the Old and New Testaments; and no less of a miracle than the resurrection of the dead. In fact, during the first miracle [Christ's Entry into Jerusalem] and during the second [Christ's Resurrection], the same power of God was acting-the same Spirit and the same providence of God. And the prophet wanted especially to emphasize this power and majestic glory of God by the event with the little children, which event he places parallel with the wonders of the starry universe, created by the same power of God. **When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained (Psalm 8:3).**

Besides this, among those little children should be numbered the apostles themselves-and many saints, ascetics, martyrs for Christ, and virgins-thousands, thousands and thousands of those who, with innocence and open hearts, recognized Christ as the Son of God and their Savior, who embraced Him with wholehearted love and endured difficult suffering for Him. Why, exactly, did the Lord ordain praise for Himself from their mouths, and not from the mouths of nobles, philosophers and rhetoricians? He accepted their praise because of their meekness, and rejected the others because of their pride; for the proud are the greatest enemies of God. That is why Christ miraculously loosed the tongues of children, simple fisherman and peasants-to proclaim the truth contrary to their enemies, that is, the proud and empty princes and scribes of the Jews.

O Lord Most-powerful, Almighty God; loose our tongues also, that with strong faith and childlike joy we too may proclaim Thine endless glory.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE PELAGIA

Pelagia was a repentant sinner. She was born to pagan parents in Antioch, and was endowed by God with great physical beauty. Pelagia used her beauty to the destruction of her own soul and those of others. She became very wealthy as a result of her prostitution. Once, while walking past the Church of the Holy Martyr Julian, in which Bishop Nonnus was preaching, she stopped in and heard a sermon on the Dread Judgment and the punishment of sinners. Those words so shook her and changed her that she immediately felt revulsion for herself, acquired true fear of God, repented of all her sins and fell down before St. Nonnus with the plea that he baptize her: "Have mercy on me, a sinner, holy Father. Baptize me and teach me repentance-I am a sea of iniquity, an abyss of destruction, a net and weapon of the devil." Thus this penitent begged the hierarch of Christ with tears, and he baptized her. At her baptism, Blessed Romana, the deaconess of the church, was her godmother. Romana, as her spiritual mother, grounded her well in the Christian Faith. But Pelagia was not satisfied with baptism alone. She was keenly aware of the multitude of her sins and, pricked by her conscience, decided on a great ascetic labor. She left her enormous, sinfully gained wealth to the poor, and secretly went to Jerusalem as the monk Pelagius. There, she shut herself up in a cell on the Mount of Olives, and began the difficult asceticism of fasting, prayer and all-night vigils. After three years, St. Nonnus's deacon, James, visited her and found her still alive, but when he visited her again several days later, he found that she had reposed, and he honorably buried her body. St. Pelagia entered into rest in about the year 461. Thus, this formerly terrible sinner pleased God by her repentance and labor, was forgiven of her sins, and became sanctified. And her purified and enlightened soul was deemed worthy of the Kingdom of God.

2. THE VENERABLE THAIS

Thais was a repentant sinner. She was an Egyptian by birth. Like St. Pelagia, Thais also spent her youth in unrestrained fornication. Thais was directed in this evil way of life by her shameless mother. But the merciful God, Who does not desire the death of a sinner, but salvation, found a way in His wondrous providence to save the sinner Thais. One of the disciples of St. Anthony the Great, Paphnutius the Sindonite, heard of Thais's sinful life, and the spiritual poison with which she was poisoning the souls of many men. He decided to save her, with God's help. Clothed in secular clothing, St. Paphnutius took one gold coin and went to the city. He found Thais and gave her the gold coin. Thais, thinking that this man gave her the gold coin for an impure act, took Paphnutius into her room. Then Paphnutius opened his blessed mouth and denounced Thais's sins and called her to repentance. Thais's soul and conscience were both awakened, and she burst into tears of profound, sincere repentance. Distributing all her goods to the poor, she entered a convent at the instruction of St. Paphnutius, and remained there for about three years, closed off in a cell, living only on bread and water. St. Paphnutius visited her before her death, and brought her out of her cell against her will. She soon fell ill, and after a brief illness gave up her purified and sanctified soul to God. St. Paul the Simple, another disciple of St. Anthony, saw in a vision a most beautiful habitation in Paradise, prepared by God for St. Thais the penitent. This holy soul entered into rest in the year 340.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR PELAGIA

Pelagia was a maiden from an eminent family in Antioch. During the reign of Emperor Numerian, the governor of Antioch sent soldiers to bring Pelagia to trial as a known Christian. The soldiers surrounded the house and called the holy maiden to come to the door. She greeted them, and when she heard that they were taking her before the judge, she pretended to be happy, and told the soldiers to wait for a moment while she went back into the house to change clothes. Then she climbed to the roof of the house, raised her hands to heaven and prayed to God for a long time that He receive her soul and not permit her virginal purity be defiled. God received her soul, and her body fell dead before the soldiers. St. John Chrysostom wrote: "Her death came about not by natural causes but rather by the command of God." And he continues: "Thus, this virginal body, more pure than any gold, lay on the ground; angels surrounded it, archangels honored it and Christ Himself was beside her."

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE PELAGIA

Pelagia the sinner repented,
And with knowledge of the true Faith, illumined her soul.
The world beckoned her, the world enticed her, but she hearkened not.
Her conscience was awakened, her soul began to shine.
How much effort she applied, how many struggles
She endured, wrestling with her sinful body-
Itself like a decaying apple.
So much effort, so much suffering she invested,
Until she deified her unhappy soul through faith.
In the heavens, God's sun shone,
But Pelagia's soul shone more.
Repentance-God has left us repentance.
By repentance, Pelagia was glorified.

REFLECTION

Oh, if only we would invest as much effort in our souls as we invest in our bodies! Oh, if only we could become as desirous of adorning ourselves with virtue before God and His glorious angels, as we do with the vain, transitory, external displays of appearances! At first, both Pelagia and Thais were only aware of their bodies, while their souls were slaves bound in the prison of the body. Both were adorned with nothing but vanity: clothed in vanity, arrayed with vanity, surrounded by vanity, and flattered by vanity. But what a sudden change! What a divine turn of events in their lives! More wondrous than if a wild apple were to be grafted and begin to bring forth sweet fruits; or if a turgid, fetid swamp were suddenly to become clear, pure potable water. When Bishop Nonnus, in the company of other bishops, first saw the sinner Pelagia in her outward splendor-clothed in the most expensive garments, adorned and bedecked with rings, necklaces and baubles, perfumed, and surrounded by slaves-Bishop Nonnus began to weep, and said to his companions: "In truth, I have learned much from this woman. The Lord will set her before His Dread Judgment and will rebuke us through her. How many hours does this woman spend in her room bathing herself, clothing herself, adorning herself, and looking at herself in the mirror-and for what? Only to appear more beautiful to men. And we, who have the immortal Bridegroom in heaven, do not strive to adorn our souls with repentance; we do not hasten to bathe them with the tears of repentance and clothe them in the beauty of the virtues, that they might appear more beautiful before the eyes of God!"

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the unrighteousness of King Ahab, and God's punishment of him through the Prophet Elias (**I Kings 16, 17**):

1. How Ahab gave himself up totally to idolatry, and did that which is evil in the sight of the Lord;
2. How the Prophet Elias shut the heavens by his prayer, and there was no rain for three years.

HOMILY

-on how the weapons of the enemy will vanish in the end-

O thou enemy, thy destructions are come to a perpetual end, even as the cities which thou has destroyed; thy memorial is perished with a roar (Psalm 9:6).

The enemy of the human race, the murderer of men from the very beginning, has used every weapon and intrigue against man. He thinks up new weapons and new intrigues day and night, in order to destroy someone as a roaring **lion, ... seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8)**. He hides like a poisonous snake and awaits his prey; he stretches his webs everywhere, like a spider, with the sole purpose of ensnaring some human soul and entrapping it in his foul kingdom. Pagan peoples were his cities. Until the coming of Christ, he ruled untroubled and absolutely in them. When they served idols, they served him; the practices of soothsaying and fortune-telling served him; he protected, directed and enhanced men's unbridled licentiousness; human sacrifice, fiery passions, discord, war, evildoings of all descriptions-this was all pleasure for him. But in the end, no weapons remained in him; his "cities" were destroyed and his **memorial is perished with a roar**. This "end" of which the prophet speaks is the coming of Jesus Christ the Lord into the world. The Lord manifested His power over the devil when He overcame his temptations on the mountain. He manifested His authority in driving demons out of men, commanding them to go this way or that; He manifested His invincible lordship over sin and death by His suffering and Resurrection. And, what is perhaps most important, He harrowed hell and scattered the demonic power. He did not desire to utterly destroy the demons, but to disperse them and smash their weapons; He smashed them and scattered them as He later did the Jews, but more terribly than He did the Jews. He freed the people from their domination; and even more importantly, He gave men authority over the demons, such that they can drive the demons out by the power of His name. Do you see how the Lord linked His victory over the demons with His mercy toward men? He so weakened and broke them, He so confused and dispersed them, that He placed them under the authority of men. Even so, the Lord did not grant authority over demons to all men, but only to those who believe in Him and who follow His commandments. He gave them authority, and He also gave them a weapon. That weapon is the Cross.

O Lord our God, our Savior from the dominion of the devil, help us also to do that "least part" that Thou hast left us to do.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE JAMES

James, the son of Alphaeus, was one of the Twelve Apostles. He was the blood-brother of the Apostle and Evangelist Matthew. He was a witness of the true words and miracles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and a witness of His suffering, Resurrection and Ascension. After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the lot fell to James to preach the Gospel of Christ in Eleutheropolis and the surrounding areas, and then in Egypt, where he suffered for his Savior. With great power in word and in deed, James disseminated the saving news of the incarnate Word of God, destroying idolatry, driving demons out of men, and healing every infirmity and disease in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. His labor and zeal were crowned with great success. Many pagans came to believe in Christ, churches were built and organized, and priests and bishops were ordained. James suffered in the Egyptian town of Ostracina, being crucified by the pagans. Thus, this great and wonderful apostle of Christ took up his abode in the Heavenly Kingdom, to reign eternally with the King of Glory.

2. THE VENERABLE ANDRONICUS AND HIS WIFE ATHANASIA

Andronicus was a citizen of Antioch during the reign of Theodosius the Great. Andronicus was a goldsmith by trade. He and his wife were very devout, continually striving to follow the way of the Lord. He gave a third of his income to the poor, another third to the church, and supported his family with the last third. After two children were born to them, they agreed to live as brother and sister. However, according to God's unfathomable providence, both of their children died on the same day, and they were in great sorrow. Then the holy martyr Julian appeared to Athanasia at the children's grave, and comforted her with the tidings that her children were in the Kingdom of God, and were better off there than with their parents on earth. Andronicus and Athanasia left everything and went to Egypt and received the monastic tonsure-St. Andronicus with the elder Daniel at Scetis; and Athanasia in the convent in Tabennisi. Pleasing God by their long years of asceticism, they at last went to the Eternal Kingdom of Christ. St. Athanasia reposed first, and eight days later, St. Andronicus.

3. THE RIGHTEOUS ABRAHAM AND LOT

Their lives can be read in the Book of Genesis.

4. SAINT DEMETRIUS, PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA

Demetrius was the eleventh Bishop of Alexandria after St. Mark the Evangelist. He governed his flock long and wisely, from 189 to 231. During this time, he received a request from India and sent St. Pantaenus, the director of the famous catechetical school in Alexandria, to India to preach the Gospel. It was in India that Pantaenus found the Gospel written by St. Matthew in Aramaic.

5. SAINT STEFAN, DESPOT OF SERBIA

Stefan was the son of the Despot George and Queen Irene. He and his sister Mara lived at the court of Sultan Murat II for a time. He was blinded at Jedrene together with his brother Grgur. He received authority as Despot over Serbia in 1458. Soon after that, he had to flee his country to Albania where he married Angelina, the daughter of Skenderbeg. Blind and unfortunate but always devoted to God, Stefan entered into rest in Italy in the year 1468. His relics repose in the Monastery of Kru edol, founded by his son St. Maxim.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE JAMES

Sent by the Lord, and obedient to Him,
The all-glorious Apostle James labored,
Sowing the Gospel seed everywhere,
So that from it would arise men faithful to Christ.
Throughout Syria and Egypt
He diligently poured forth the heavenly honey,
The sweet, healing words of Christ,
And fed hungry men with this wondrous golden food.
Wherever James traveled, he left a wonder:
Spiritual vessels full and overflowing with honey,
Inexhaustible, life-creating honey:
Holy churches, full of pure, sweet richness.
In them the eternal Creator is endlessly praised,
As are the wondrous works of the Son of God.
Christ is that honey given to the faithful,
A life-creating manna of bread and wine.
James completed his journey with a mark of red-
His martyric blood, which poured down from the cross-
And he gained a wreath from Christ, in heaven,
As have the other of God's apostles.

REFLECTION

How God both punishes and shows mercy is clearly shown to us from the lives of the last of the Serbian Despots during the Turkish conquest of the Serbian lands. The Turks did not come to the Balkans by their own power to enslave Christian peoples (Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs) but by God's permission, in the same way that Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and took the Hebrews into slavery, not by his own power but rather by God's permission. Because of the sins of their princes and nobles, the Serbian people suffered bitterly; and the princes and nobles themselves suffered even more bitterly. Despot George died as an exile; two of his sons, Grgur and Stefan, were blinded by the Turks; his daughter was forced to become the wife of a sultan; his middle son rose up against his own mother, Irene, and brother Grgur, and seized the shaky throne of Smederevo by force, only to die soon thereafter. As soon as he became despot, the blind Stefan had to flee to Albania, then to Italy where, as an exile and an unfortunate, he reposed. All of this is God's punishment. Yet where is His mercy? God glorified both Stefan and his wife Angelina and their children Maxim and John. After eight years of lying in the grave, Stefan's body was exhumed and found to be intact, and exuded a sweet, heavenly fragrance. Many miracles were manifested from his holy relics. God graced his wife and his children in the same manner, glorifying and sanctifying them.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous bringing down of fire from heaven by the Prophet Elias (**I Kings 18**):

1. How St. Elias prayed to God on Mount Carmel in the presence of King Ahab and the idolatrous priests;
2. How the fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice that Elias offered to God.

HOMILY

-on how only the foolish deny God-

**The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.
They are corrupt. They have done abominable
works (Psalm 14:1).**

The mind is the rudder of man's entire being. It counsels, persuades and guides. Both the soul and the body act according to the mind. If the mind is upright before God, then the whole man is upright. If the mind is iniquitous before God, the whole man is iniquitous. Even if someone merely thinks, "There is no God," the thought immediately manifests itself in his deeds. Evil thoughts come first and evil deeds inevitably follow. Do you see how well the inspired prophet knows the nature of man? First, he underlines the cause, then he cites the consequences. Evil deeds necessarily proceed from evil thoughts. That is why, brethren, you should not believe those who say: "I do not believe in God, but I do good deeds." First of all, he who does not believe in God does not know what good is, nor can he differentiate good from evil. By his disbelief, a man cuts himself off from the greatest Good and the Source of every good! Furthermore, let us carefully study this: you will see that all the deeds of the ungodly are corrupt and hateful. They are corrupt because they are evil, worthless and transitory; they are hateful, because they are contrary to the will of the Living God. The godless cannot distinguish good from evil, for only in the light of God's law can one determine precisely what is good and what is evil. However, it can also be that those who merely say they believe in God do corrupt and hateful deeds, acknowledging God with their lips but denying Him in deeds. It is good to confess God with your lips, but that is a long way from being enough! One must also acknowledge Him with the heart, and confirm one's faith by good deeds. Even so, it does happen that a man believes in his heart, and confesses with his lips, and still sins. This happens either from the weakness of the will or from the devil's arrows. Let such a one repent, and he will be forgiven immediately. Repentance is salvific even for the godless; how much more so for a believer? As long as a man is on earth, he has a chance for repentance. But who can be certain that his time will extend beyond this night? Hence, delaying repentance is utter foolishness.

O most gracious Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God; help us to repent as Thou dost help us to breathe.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS EULAMPIUS AND EULAMPIA

They were brother and sister from Nicomedia. During one of the terrible persecutions of Christians by Maximian some of the faithful fled Nicomedia and hid. The young Eulampius was sent into the city to buy bread. There he saw the imperial edict decreeing the persecution of Christians posted on a wall. He laughed at it, removed it, and tore it up. He was arrested and immediately brought before the judge. When the judge advised him to deny Christ, Eulampius counseled the judge to reject the false idols and to acknowledge Christ as the One Living God. The judge ordered that he be flogged for a long time until his blood flowed, and that he be tormented with other cruel tortures. Hearing of her brother's suffering, the virgin Eulampia came running, and she, together with her brother, suffered for Christ. She was flogged until blood flowed from her nose and mouth. After that, they were thrown into boiling pitch, and then into a red-hot furnace, but by the power of the sign of the Cross and the name of Christ, they rendered the fire harmless. Finally Eulampius was beheaded, but Eulampia died before being beheaded. Two hundred other Christians were also slain, who had come to believe in Christ upon witnessing the power and miracles of St. Eulampius and his sister. All were crowned with martyrs' wreaths, and passed over into their eternal heavenly homeland.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS OF ZOGRAPHOU

When Emperor Michael Palaeologus contracted the infamous Union of Lyons with the pope, in order to obtain help from the West against the Bulgarians and Serbs, the monks of the Holy Mountain sent a protest to the emperor against this Union, imploring him to reject it and return to Orthodoxy. The pope dispatched an army to help the emperor. The Latin army entered the Holy Mountain and committed such barbarism as the Turks had never committed in five hundred years. Having hanged the Protaton, and having killed many monks in Vatopedi, Iveron and other monasteries, the Latins attacked Zographou. The blessed Abbot Thomas warned the brethren that whoever wished to be spared from the Latins should flee from the monastery, and that whoever desired a martyr's death should remain. And so, twenty-six men remained: the abbot, twenty-one monks, and four laymen who served as laborers for the monastery. They all closed themselves in the monastery's tower. When the Latins arrived, they set fire to the tower and these twenty-six heroes of Christ found a martyr's death in the fire. While the tower was burning, they chanted the Psalms and the Akathist to the Most-holy Mother of God. They gave their holy souls to God on October 10, 1283. In December of the same year, the dishonorable Emperor Michael died in poverty, when the Serbian King Milutin rose up against him in defense of Orthodoxy.

3. THE VENERABLE THEOPHILUS THE CONFESSOR

Theophilus was a Macedonian Slav from somewhere near Strumica. He was tonsured a monk when still young, and founded his own monastery. He suffered much for the icons during the reign of Leo the Isaurian, and would have been slain on one occasion, had he not succeeded in convincing Governor Hypaticus, his judge, of the principle and need for the veneration of icons. The governor freed him. Theophilus returned to his monastery, where he reposed peacefully in the year 716, and entered into the joy of his Lord.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR THEOTECNUS

He was a Roman officer in Antioch during the reign of Emperor Maximian. When the emperor urged him to sacrifice to the idols, he replied: ``I believe in Christ God, and to Him will I offer myself as a sacrifice-a living sacrifice." After cruel tortures, he was drowned by being thrown into the sea with a stone around his neck. He suffered honorably for Christ and was crowned with the wreath of martyrdom.

5. THE VENERABLE BASSIAN

During the reign of the right-believing Emperor Marcian, this saint came to Constantinople from Anatolia in the year 450. Great was his asceticism, and great was the wonderworking power that God bestowed upon him. Bassian had about three hundred disciples. Among them was St. Matrona. Emperor Marcian built a church in Bassian's name, which still exists today.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS OF ZOGRAPHOU

Heroes of Zographou, knights of truth,
Sacrificed themselves for the Orthodox Faith,
And shamed the proud, shameless Latins,
As their souls rose up to the Kingdom of God.
The tower's flames mounted up to heaven,
As the monks in the fire sent up praise to God!
Heaven with its angels beheld that spectacle,
As the criminals crawled about like worms below the tower.
In the flames, Abbot Thomas, a true parent,
Encouraged his brethren, and began the Psalms:
He who glorifies the Lord does not fear death,
And he who dies for God will not perish.
The sacrifice is offered, and the altar of oblation remains:
The bodies were burned, the souls flew off,
And by that sacrifice, Zographou increased in glory
With magnificence eternal and true.
St. George the knight, cherishes his knights
As the Mother of God cherishes all heavenly citizens.
In these knights of righteousness, the Church rejoices:
They are her children, her fruitful branches.

REFLECTION

By God's providence, the greatest number of miracles and heavenly manifestations occur during the martyrdom of His servants. On the day that the Latins set out for the Monastery of Zographou, an old monk had an obedience in a vineyard half an hour's distance from the monastery. At the prescribed time, he read the Akathist before the icon of the Mother of God. However, when he began to pronounce the word ``Rejoice!" a voice came to him from the icon: ``Do thou also rejoice, O elder! Flee from here now, or misfortune will befall thee; go and tell the brethren of the monastery to lock themselves in, for the God-opposing Latins have attacked this, my chosen Mountain, and are already near." The frightened elder fell to his knees and cried out in fear: ``How can I leave thee here, my Queen and Intercessor?" At this he again heard the voice: ``Do not worry about me, but go quickly!" The elder went to the monastery immediately. But when he reached the monastery gates he beheld that same icon of the Mother of God. In a miraculous manner, the icon had preceded him to the monastery. The amazed elder related all that had been revealed to him to the abbot and the brethren. At that, all of them glorified God and the Mother of God.

Once, during the celebration of the Feast of the twenty-six martyrs of Zographou, on October 10, 1873, there was a great all-night vigil. It was a moonless night. In the middle of the night, while the monks were chanting and reading the lives of the holy martyrs in the church, a noise was suddenly heard, and over the church a fiery pillar appeared, extending from earth to heaven. It was so bright that things at a distance could be seen as though it were midday. This wondrous manifestation lasted for about a quarter of an hour and then disappeared.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's miraculous appearance to the Prophet Elias (**I Kings 19**):

1. How Elias, fatigued by the unrighteousness of the people, prayed to God to grant him death;
2. How God comforted Elias by His appearing on Horeb;
3. How there was a strong wind, then an earthquake, then fire, and finally a still, small voice-the voice of God.

HOMILY

-on the sufferings of David and the prophecy of the sufferings of Christ-

For many dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet (Psalm 22:16).

This is the mystical experience of the penitent David, and, at the same time, a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. **Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (II Timothy 3:12)**, says the Apostle Paul. When King David sinned, the devils did not appear to him nor did they disturb him; but when he began to repent and to direct his life on the path of God, then the devils surrounded him and tormented him. The words here are not about men but about demons, who sometimes attack the penitent directly, or torment him through other men. David would not have called God's people, the crown of God's creation, ``dogs." Rather, he called the demons ``dogs," who are perceived by righteous men as dogs, snakes, black men, lions, or in some other form. That he here means ``dogs" as evil spirits can be proven by the written lives of the great ascetics, to whom the demons appeared in the form of dogs and other animals, to frighten them. We can also be convinced of this from the words of the Lord our Savior, that He spoke from the Cross: **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)**. This means that the Jews were not doing their own will but rather someone else's: the demons' will. For **many dogs** and **the congregation of the wicked** gathered to destroy Christ the Lord. When the devil-the tempter-could not defeat the Lord on the Mount of Temptation by his false promises, he began with all his might to destroy Him through men by a dishonorable death on the Cross. Brethren, see how clear the prophecy is! **They pierced My hands and My feet**. These words could not have pertained to anyone else, in the entire history of the world, but the crucified Savior. This prophecy continues in great detail: **They divided My garments among them and for My vesture they cast lots (Psalm 22:18)**. Everything happened as it was prophesied-everything! But the devil was deluded in his reckoning. He thought he could destroy the One mightier than death, by condemning Him to death. He thought to dishonor Him Who alone gives honor to all creation. By his glorious Resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ conquered and shamed the devil and his entire pack of dogs, and gave man power and authority over them. The whole pagan world was unable to exorcize even one single demon; but we, by the name of Christ and by the power of His Cross, are able to disperse legions of demons like smoke-for, after Christ's victory, the demons became like whipped and frightened dogs.

O Lord, Conqueror and Savior, to You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE PHILIP

Philip was born in Palestinian Caesarea. He was married and had four daughters. All four were endowed by God with the gift of prophecy, and all four were vowed virgins for the sake of Christ. When the holy apostles chose deacons, Philip was chosen with Stephen and the others. He served the needy and widows with great diligence. When the persecution of Christians began in Jerusalem, Apostle Philip found refuge in Samaria, and there preached the Gospel and gave witness by many miracles: driving out demons, healing the sick, and so forth. Seeing the miracles of the holy apostle, Simon the Magician was baptized. St. Philip also baptized the eunuch of Queen Candace. After that, an angel of God suddenly and invisibly translated him to Azotus, where he taught, preached and converted many to Christ. Philip was appointed Bishop of Tralles. He reposed peacefully in deep old age, and took up his habitation in the joy of his Lord.

2. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE SEVENTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

The Seventh Ecumenical Council was held in 787 at Nicaea during the reign of the devout Empress Irene and her son, Constantine, in the time of Patriarch Tarasius. This Council finally confirmed the veneration of icons, justifying it by Holy Scripture, by the witness of the Holy Fathers, and by the undeniable example of miracles manifested through the holy icons. Adding to examples of miracles previously cited, Bishop Constantine of Cyprus recounted this: One day, a certain shepherd from the town of Constantia drove his flock to pasture, and there saw an icon of the Most-holy Theotokos, all decorated with flowers by the faithful. "Why render so much honor to a rock?" said the shepherd, who had obviously been brought up in iconoclasm. He struck the icon with his iron shepherd's cane, and damaged the right eye of the image of the Mother of God. As soon as he turned away, he stumbled over that same cane and gouged out his own right eye. Thus injured, he returned to the city, crying out tearfully that the punishment of the Theotokos had befallen him. This Council also decreed that the holy relics of a martyr be placed, without fail, in the Antimension. Three hundred and sixty-seven Fathers participated in this Council. May the Lord also have mercy on us and save us by their prayers.

3. THE VENERABLE THEOPHANES THE BRANDED

Theophanes was a confessor and writer of canons. He was born in Arabia of wealthy and pious parents. With his brother Theodore (December 27), he was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified. As they were very educated monks, Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem sent them to Emperor Leo the Armenian, to justify and defend the veneration of icons. The iniquitous emperor harshly tortured these holy brothers and cast them into prison. Later, the iconoclastic Emperor Theophilus resumed their torture and commanded that words of mockery be branded on their faces, to expose them to the ridicule of the world. When the iconoclastic controversy was resolved, Theophanes was freed, and shortly thereafter was consecrated a bishop. He died peacefully in the year 847, having suffered for the holy icons for a total of twenty-five years. He wrote 145 Canons. He entered into the eternal joy of his Lord.

4. SAINT NECTARIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

As a layman and a high-ranking court official, Nectarius was unanimously chosen as patriarch in 381, succeeding St. Gregory the Theologian. He was distinguished by profound understanding, tact and zeal for the Church. He reposed peacefully in the year 397.

5. THE HOLY MARTYRS ZINAIDA AND PHILONILLA

Zinaida and Philonilla were sisters by birth, and were born in Tarsus. They are called the kinswomen of St. Paul the Apostle. Remaining virgins, they renounced the world for the sake of Christ, and, withdrawing to a cave, lived the ascetic life. They were knowledgeable in medicine and healed many of the sick. Because of her great fasting, Philonilla especially was vouchsafed the gift of miracle-working. Certain unbelievers attacked them one night and stoned them to death.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE THEOPHANES THE BRANDED

Theophanes of St. Sava's, a great ascetic,
Profound theologian and glorious hymnographer,
A sufferer for Christ, a confessor of the Faith,
An adornment of the Church, a Father of Orthodoxy:
He left his cell for the sake of obedience,
And from his silence, stepped out into the world once again,
To persuade the evil emperor of the truth;
And he witnessed that truth to the emperor.
St. Theophanes traded a quarter century for true happiness,
Though he passed this time in suffering most dire,
And in the dank prison
Wore the brand of suffering on his face.
But, inspired by the Spirit, this saint of God
Also infused these years with chants sublime,
Glorifying the Lord and the saints of God
With fervent hope, love and faith.

REFLECTION

Just as, by God's providence, the power of miraculous healing is given to blessed water or sanctified oil, so this same power is also given to icons. St. Athanasius the Great cites one wonderful example of the miraculous power of holy icons: In the town of Beirut, there lived a Christian in a rented house. In moving out of the house, he forgot an icon of the Savior. Then a Jew moved into that house. There were many Jews in that town who were particularly embittered against the Christian Faith. Consequently, when the icon was found in the house, the Jews carried it to their gathering place and mocked it, as their ancestors had once mocked the living Savior. The Jews also did to the icon what their ancestors had done to the Savior: they pierced the hands and feet with nails, wiped vinegar on the lips of the image on the icon, and mocked the image of the Savior in every way possible. Finally, one of them took a spear and struck the divine image under the rib. But oh, the wonder-blood and water flowed from the image's wound as they had from the living body of the crucified Lord. The Jews' terror cannot be described. However, they brought a vessel to catch the blood, and brought many of the sick, blind, deaf, lame and insane to the icon. As soon as the Jews anointed the ailing with this blood, they were healed. The whole town gathered to see this miracle and all glorified Jesus Christ, the true God; and all the Jews in that town came to believe in the living and life-giving Lord Jesus Christ.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the numerous unrighteous acts of the people of Israel, and the numerous punishments that God visited upon them (**II Kings 24**):

1. How the princes of the people often turned away from God, and did that which is evil in the sight of God;
2. How God punished the people in order to correct them;
3. How finally, under the evil King Jehoiachin, the Israelites were taken into the Babylonian captivity.

HOMILY

-on the voice of the Lord upon the waters-

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters (Psalm 29:3).

The voice of the Lord was heard over Jordan, when St. John baptized the Savior. On the Sea of Galilee, when there were storms and winds, **the voice of the Lord** was heard, and the tempest was calmed and the winds ceased. **The voice of the Lord** was heard at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee, and the water was changed into wine. **The voice of the Lord** was heard at the Red Sea, and the sea parted and a path was opened for the people of God. **The voice of the Lord** was heard in the wilderness, and water flowed from a dry rock. Given all this, what does **the voice of the Lord is upon the waters** mean? It means that the element, water, is the work of God; and through it, God works miracles when He wills, and how He wills. No less are the other elements the work of God: fire, air and earth. And God is Lord over them all, and through them He works miracles when He wills, and how He wills.

God the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of fire at Pentecost. In the furnace at Babylon, the flames lost their power at the sound of **the voice of the Lord**, and did not harm the blessed children. Fire was sent down from heaven to consume the sacrifice of Gideon (**Judges 6**). Elias brought down fire from the heavens (**II Kings 1:10**). The bush burned and was not consumed (**Exodus 3**). Fire from heaven came down and consumed Elias's sacrifice to God (**I Kings 18:38**). A fiery pillar went before the Israelites (**Exodus 13, 14**). All of this was according to the word of the Lord.

The earth opened up and swallowed the unrighteous Korah, Dathan and Abiram (**Numbers 16:32**). The earth opened and hid Elizabeth and the infant child John from the sword of Herod. The earth quaked when the Lord breathed His last on the Cross, and the graves opened up (**Matthew 27:51-52**).

The Lord ascended into the heavens through the air (**Luke 24:51**). The holy apostles were carried through the air to Jerusalem, from various parts of the world. An angel took the Prophet Habakkuk to Babylon through the air in an instant (**Bel and the Dragon 1:35**). And all of this was in accord with **the voice of the Lord**: by the Lord's command. When will men be as obedient to **the voice of the Lord** as the irrational elements of nature are? Then again, "the waters" is to be interpreted as meaning "men"-men who are obedient to **the voice of the Lord**-the apostles and the saints. Like water, they covered the earth with the preaching of Christ our God. Like water, they assuaged the thirsty world with the effusion of the fountain of eternal life, and the world was restored and blossomed. Upon them, just as upon ordinary water, numerous miracles were manifested; for they were submissive to the will of God, obedient to the voice of God, just like water.

O Lord Jesus Christ, help us to be obedient to Thy voice. Help us to be ashamed before lifeless elements that obey Thee better than we do.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS TARACHUS, PROBUS AND ANDRONICUS

Tarachus was born in Syrian Claudopolis, Probus was from Perga of Pamphylia, and Andronicus was the son of an eminent citizen of Ephesus. All three were martyred together by the Proconsul Numerian Maximus, in Emperor Diocletian's time. Tarachus was sixty-five years old when he was tortured. The proconsul asked him for his name, and he answered: "I am a Christian." The proconsul asked thrice, and received the same answer each time. These martyrs were beaten with rods, then were cast into prison bloodied and wounded. After this, they were brought out again for torture. When the proconsul advised Probus to deny Christ, promising him imperial honors and his own friendship, holy Probus replied: "Neither the emperor's honors do I desire, nor your friendship do I wish." When Andronicus was threatened with even greater bodily tortures, the young martyr of Christ replied: "My body is before you, do with it what you will." After prolonged tortures in various locales, the three holy martyrs were thrown into an arena with wild beasts. Other prisoners in the same arena were torn apart by the beasts, but they would not harm the saints; a bear and a ferocious lioness fawned around them. Seeing this, many believed in Christ the Lord and cried out against the proconsul. Crazed with anger, and more furious than the beasts, the proconsul ordered his soldiers to enter the arena and chop the soldiers of Christ into pieces with their swords. Their bodies were mingled with the dead bodies of other prisoners. Three Christians, Macarius, Felix and Berius, who were present at the slaying of the holy martyrs, came that night to remove their bodies. But as the bodies were heaped in confusion, and the night was very dark, they prayed to God to help them find the saints; and suddenly three candles were manifested over the bodies of the martyrs. Thus, they were able to remove the saints' bodies and honorably bury them.

2. SAINT MARTIN OF TOURS

Martin was born of pagan parents in the Pannonian town of Sabaria in the year 316. His father was a Roman officer, and the young Martin was given over to military service against his will. By then, however, he was already a catechumen in the Christian Church. From early childhood he had loved the Church with all his heart. One winter, while traveling with his companions to the town of Amiens, he saw a beggar before the town gates, almost naked and shivering from the cold. Martin felt sorry for him, and fell behind his companions. He then removed his military cloak and cut it in two with his sword. He gave one half to the beggar and wrapped the other around himself, and left. That night, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in a dream, wrapped in the other half of his cloak, and said to His angels: "Martin is only a catechumen, yet behold: he has clothed Me with his garment!" Leaving the army, Martin was immediately baptized, and then baptized his mother. He was then tonsured a monk in the diocese of St. Hilary of Poitiers and led a life of true asceticism. Martin was exceptionally humble, for which God endowed him with an abundant gift of working miracles, such that he raised the dead and drove out evil spirits. Martin was appointed Bishop of Tours against his will. After abundant labor in the vineyard of the Lord, and after a difficult struggle with pagans and Arian heretics, St. Martin gave his holy soul into the hands of his Lord in the year 397.

3. THE VENERABLE COSMAS OF MAIUMA

He was born in Jerusalem. He was a friend of St. John Damascene, whose parents took him in as an orphan and raised him. As a monk, he assisted John in compiling the Octoechos, and he himself composed many canons to the saints. His canons on Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday and Passion Week are particularly distinguished by their beauty and profundity. He was Bishop of Maiuma, near Palestinian Gaza. He outlived St. John Damascene, and died in deep old age.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MARTIN, BISHOP OF TOURS

St. Martin, a child of Pannonia,
And the great illuminator of Gaul,
Despised the earthly emperor's honors,
And became a servant of the heavenly King.
The will of a powerful giant
Was in Martin's merciful heart.
Martin sprinkled himself with ashes,
And on the ashes this humble one slept,
Out of love for his God-
Crucified for sinful men.
And Martin had crucified himself to the world
Solely to reach the goal!
Martin led the battle against demons,
Yielding to none of their temptations,
And led the battle against impudent men,
Against dark, dishonorable heresies.
Martin was a knight of Orthodoxy,
And a victor, wondrous and glorious.
With the battle won, the knight rests
With the angels close to Christ the King:
And yet even now he lifts up prayers,
And comes to the aid of those in peril.

REFLECTION

By what virtue have the saints been most exalted and glorified in the eyes of heaven and men? Primarily by their humility and service. Even before his baptism, while he was still an officer, St. Martin had a servant whom he considered more a brother than a servant. He often served this servant unashamedly; in fact, he even rejoiced in it. Again, when St. Hilary wanted to ordain him a priest, he refused this honor with tears, and begged the bishop to let him simply be a monk in some remote place. Once, St. Martin was traveling from France to Pannonia to visit his parents. While he was crossing over the Alps, murderous robbers captured him. When one of the robbers raised his sword to behead him, Martin showed no fear, and remained motionless; he did not beg for mercy but was completely at peace, as if nothing were happening. The robber, amazed at such behavior, lay aside his sword and asked Martin who he was. Martin replied that he was a Christian, and hence, he was not afraid-for he knew that God, according to His great mercy, is always close to men, especially in times of danger. The thieves were astonished at the rare virtue of this man of God, and he who had drawn his sword against Martin believed in Christ, was baptized, and later became a monk. When the episcopal throne in Tours became vacant, the people wanted Martin to be bishop, but Martin did not even want to hear of it. However, certain citizens of Tours craftily lured him from the monastery and carried him off. They came to the gate of Martin's monastery and told the Martin that a sick man was out there with them, and they begged him for a blessing. When Martin came out they seized him, took him to Tours, and had him consecrated bishop. In old age, he foresaw his approaching death. He told his brethren and they began to weep copiously, begging him not to leave them. The saint, seeking to comfort them, prayed to God in their presence and said: "Lord, if I am still needed by Thy people, I do not reject the labor. Let it be according to Thy holy will."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous work of the Apostles Peter and John (**Acts 3**):

1. How a beggar, lame from birth, asked them for alms;
2. How Peter told him they had no silver or gold;
3. How the apostle took him by the hand and said, **In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk!** and the sick man was made whole.

HOMILY

-on weeping in the evening and joy in the morning-

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

God rebukes, and God makes glad. Just one repentant thought eases the wrath of God; for God is not angry at men as an enemy is angry, but His anger toward men is as that of a father toward his children. His anger is momentary, and His mercy is infinite. If He rebukes you in the evening, He causes you to rejoice in the morning; men know Him best in His rebuking and in His mercy. O my brethren, if men constantly knew and recognized God as the Doer of good, they would never know Him as Rebuker and Judge. Behold, God rejoices more when we recognize Him by His mercy than by His anger. However, there are very ungrateful and thoughtless people who never remember God when He grants mercy, but remember Him only when He chastises and rebukes them through sickness, death in the family, failure and shame before men, fire, the sword, earthquake or flood, or numerous other punitive rods and sticks with which He chastens the unawakened, reminds the ungrateful, brings the errant to their senses, and reminds everyone that He is the Creator and Lord, the Giver of Gifts and the Judge.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. These words also mean that the night is for weeping and prayer, for repentance and divine contemplation. The night especially is for repentance, and there is no true repentance without tears. At night a man thinks without hindrance about his deeds, his words, and his thoughts, and repents for all that he has done contrary to God's law. If a man weeps in repentance at night, then he will rejoice during the day. He will rejoice as a newborn, as one bathed, as one alleviated from the burden of sin. But, if he spends the night in sin and senseless revelry, a sorrowful and tearful day will dawn for him.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Teacher, rebuke us, but forgive us; chastise us, but save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS CARPUS AND PAPYLUS

Carpus was Bishop of Thyateira and Papyrus was a deacon. They were born in Pergamum where they finally suffered for the Christian Faith at the hands of the evil proconsul Valerius, during the reign of Decius. Valerius tied them to horses and dragged them to Sardis, where he subjected them to harsh tortures. Then an angel of God appeared to them, healed them of their wounds and encouraged them. Carpus's servant, Agathadorus, followed his master with great sorrow. Valerius then condemned him to torture as well. The saints were again tied to horses, and were dragged from Sardis to Pergamum. They tied holy Carpus to a tree and flogged him so that his body was covered with wounds, and his blood flowed like a stream, soaking the ground; but Carpus smiled in the midst of these horrible tortures. When they asked him why he was smiling, the holy martyr replied that he saw the heavens opened and the Lord seated on His throne, surrounded by Cherubim and Seraphim. As Papyrus was being tortured, by prayer he healed a man blind in one eye, and many who witnessed this came to believe in Christ the Lord. Thrown to wild beasts, the martyrs remained unharmed. Then they were thrown into a fiery furnace. Agathonica, Carpus's sister, also leaped into the fire, but the fire did not consume them. Finally, they were all beheaded with the sword, in the year 251. Thus, after their righteous endeavors, they received a wreath of glory in the Kingdom of Christ.

2. THE HIEROMARTYR BENJAMIN THE DEACON

This soldier of Christ was a Persian who zealously preached the Gospel and brought many pagans, both Persians and Greeks, to the Christian Faith. He suffered during the reign of the Persian King Yezdegerd, circa 412. When he was cast into prison, one of the king's nobles defended him to the king. The king then released him, under the condition that he no longer preach Christ to the people. Benjamin boldly said: "This I can never give up. For he who hides the talent given him will be given over to great suffering," and he continued to spread the Christian Faith. The emperor had him seized, and commanded that thorns be driven under his nails, and he was further tortured until he rendered his spirit to God.

3. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR ZLATA OF MEGLIN

Zlata was born of poor peasant parents (who also had three other daughters) in the village of Slatina, in the province of Meglin. She was a meek and devout girl, wise in the wisdom of Christ and golden, not only in name but also in her God-fearing heart. Once when Zlata went out to get water, some shameless Turks seized her and took her to their home. When one of them urged her to become a Moslem and be his wife, Zlata fearlessly replied: "I believe in Christ and Him alone do I know as my Bridegroom. I will never deny Him, even though you subject me to a thousand tortures and cut me into pieces." When her parents and sisters found her, her parents said to her: "O daughter, have mercy on yourself and on us, your parents and sisters; deny Christ in words only, so that we can all be happy, for Christ is merciful. He would forgive such a sin, committed due to the necessities of life." Her poor parents, sisters and relatives wept bitterly. However, the noble soul of St. Zlata resisted such diabolical snares. She answered them: "When you counsel me to deny Christ the true God, you are no longer my parents or my sisters. I have the Lord Jesus Christ as my father, the Theotokos as my mother, and the saints as my brothers and sisters." The Turks then cast her into prison for three months, flogging her every day until her blood soaked the ground. Finally, they suspended her upside down and lit a fire, to suffocate her with the smoke; but God was with Zlata, and gave her strength in suffering. At last they hanged her from a tree and cut her into small pieces. Thus, this brave virgin gave her soul up to God, and went to dwell in Paradise in the year 1796. Pieces of her relics were taken by Christians to their homes for a blessing.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR ZLATA OF MEGLIN

The Turks tortured St. Zlata of golden heart,
Tormented her to death for Christ the Living God.
Golden Zlata wept not, nor did she waver,
But surrendered her whole heart to the Lord of Heaven.
The tears of parents and sisters were in vain:
Zlata sought delight through sufferings, true delight-
The delight that Christ prepares for wise virgins,
The joy that the Bridegroom bestows upon faithful brides.
The cage of the body of Zlata the Golden was destroyed,
And her soul was freed from its fragile prison.
Zlata rose up to Paradise, joyful in soul,
Taking her place among the royal, holy angels.
St. Zlata, once a poor peasant girl,
Is now glorified in Paradise as a queen.

REFLECTION

There is nothing more wretched than a man who, in the hour of misfortune, abandons hope in God and resorts to a means of salvation contrary to the Law of God. Not only does such a man not succeed in righting his outward situation, but he also loses his soul. Such was the case with Emperor Michael Palaeologus. In order to save his kingdom-threatened by the Bulgars and Serbs-he sought help from the pope, and agreed to an uncanonical union. What did he gain by this? He did not save the kingdom, but did commit numerous evil crimes. Soon after, he died miserably in a military campaign against John Ducas, Prince of Epirus. The Orthodox people were so resentful toward him that his son, Andronicus, dared not bury him publicly, but buried him at night without a funeral or prayer. He was cut off from the Orthodox Church, and he was not received by the Roman Church. Michael Palaeologus died outside the Church of God. Following Michael's death, his widow, the empress, issued the following decree: "My majesty abhors and regards as loathsome this action [the Union] that has recently occurred in the Church and created discord in it.... And, as the Holy Church of God has determined not to sanction any official commemoration of my deceased spouse, our lord and king, because of the aforementioned deed and discord, My Majesty also, submitting all things to the fear of God and obedience to the Holy Church, approve and accept this, the Church's decision, and never will I dare to perform a memorial service for my lord and spouse."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous punishment by which the Apostle Peter punished Ananias (**Acts 5**):

1. How Ananias, and then his wife Sapphira, lied and concealed part of the money;
2. How the Apostle Peter denounced them, and they fell down and died one after the other.

HOMILY

-on the burden of sin and deliverance from sin-

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Psalm 32:1).

Fear, confusion, weakness, infirmity and darkening of the mind are born of sin. By sin, a man provokes others against himself, confuses his own conscience, attracts demons to himself, and gives them weapons against himself. By sin, a man separates himself from God, estranges himself from his guardian angel, and walls himself off from the source of all good. The committing of sin signifies a declaration of war against God and all godly powers. This is more preposterous than if a withered autumn leaf were to declare war on the wind. And, indeed, the most preposterous thing of all occurs: a man declares war on God! This declaration alone guarantees ruin and destruction for a man if he does not quickly come to himself, repent and flee to God for mercy.

The great King David was well aware of the terrible predicament of the sinner, and he himself experienced it. He felt inexpressible fear, confusion, weakness and loneliness; he felt the arrows of men and the arrows of demons. But, realizing his horrible situation, David acknowledged his sin, prostrated himself in ashes before God, soaked the ground with tears of repentance and words of anguish that burned like fire, and prayed to the merciful God to forgive him. And, when all was forgiven him, he felt inexpressible blessedness. This blessedness of the forgiven soul he could not express in words. He could only declare, confirm and assure us of the condition of sinfulness and the condition of forgiveness from God, based on his direct experience of both conditions: **Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Psalm 32:1)**. What is this blessing? Freedom, courage, indescribable joy, power, strength, clarity of thought, peace of conscience, hope in God, hymnody to God, love for one's neighbors, and meaning to one's life! In other words: light, joy and strength are the blessing. This is the blessing that one who is forgiven of sin feels here on earth. If this is so, then what is the blessing that awaits him in heaven, that **eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man (I Corinthians 2:9)**?

O Lord our God, forgive us our transgressions by Thine infinite mercy, and cover our sins!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE PARASCEVA [PETKA]

This glorious saint was of Serbian descent, and was born in the town of Epivat between Selymbria and Constantinople. St. Parasceva's parents were wealthy, devout Christians. They also had a son, Euthymius, who was tonsured a monk during his parents' lifetime, and later became the famous Bishop of Madytos. The virgin Parasceva always yearned for the ascetic life for the sake of Christ. After her parents' repose, she left her home and went first to Constantinople, then to the wilderness of Jordan, where she lived the ascetic life until old age. Who can express all the labors, sufferings and demonic temptations that St. Parasceva endured in the course of her many years? In her old age, an angel of God once appeared to her and said: "Leave the wilderness and return to your homeland; it is necessary that you render your body to the earth there, and your soul to the habitation of the Lord." St. Parasceva obeyed, and returned to Epivat. There she lived for two years in ceaseless fasting and prayer, then gave up her soul to God and took up her abode in Paradise. St. Parasceva entered into rest in the eleventh century. Over the course of time her relics were translated to Constantinople, to Trnovo, again to Constantinople, and then to Belgrade. Her relics now repose in Romania, in the town of Iasi. In Belgrade, the well of St. Petka miraculously heals the sick who draw near with faith in God and love for this saint.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS NAZARIUS, GERVASIUS AND PROTASIIUS

Nazarius was born in Rome of a Jewish father and a Christian mother. His mother, Perpetua, was baptized by the Apostle Peter himself. Confessing his mother's Faith, Nazarius sincerely fulfilled all the precepts of the Church. Fearlessly preaching the Gospel, Nazarius went to Milan. There, he found the Christians Gervasius and Protasius in prison, and ministered to them with great love. Learning of this, the local eparch ordered Nazarius to be beaten and driven from the city. His mother came to him in a vision and told him to go to Gaul, and to preach the Gospel there; and this is what Nazarius did. After several years, Nazarius returned to Milan-this time with a disciple, the young man Celsus, whom he had baptized in Gaul. There he found the brothers Gervasius and Protasius still in prison, and he was soon thrown in with them by the governor Anulinus. Christ's martyrs rejoiced because of this reunion brought about by God's providence. Emperor Nero ordered Nazarius slain, and the governor brought Nazarius and Celsus out of prison and beheaded them. Soon after that, General Astazius, passing through Milan en route to battle against the Moravians, beheaded St. Gervasius along with St. Protasius. He had heard that these two brothers would not sacrifice to idols, and fearing that he might lose the battle by losing favor with his false gods, he commanded that they be executed immediately. Gervasius and Protasius were twins, born of the blessed parents Vitalius and Valeria, who were also martyred for the Faith. The relics of St. Nazarius were translated by St. Ambrose from a garden outside the city to the Church of the Holy Apostles. The relics of St. Gervasius and St. Protasius were revealed to him in a miraculous vision.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE PARASCEVA-SAINT PETKA

"The Lord desires a pure heart":

Thus says the Gospel.

A pure virgin you remained,

And you gave your pure heart to God-

O most wonderful saint,

Saint Parasceva, our ideal!

The Lord seeks a most pure mind,

Without fancy and without falsehood;

And you presented Him your most pure mind,

Like that of an angel, of the same kind.

O most wonderful saint,

O Saint Parasceva, hearken to our petitions!

The Lord seeks a pure soul,

As a heavenly shrine;

You perfected such a soul,

And now shine in heaven.

O most wonderful saint,

Parasceva, help us!

By your prayers, help us

In the misfortunes of life.

Through the clouds of earthly sorrow

Bring us light, like a rainbow-

O chaste virgin, most wonderful,

Holy Mother Parasceva!

REFLECTION

Examples of how the saints themselves reveal their hidden relics to men justify the honor rendered to the relics of the saints-not to mention the miraculous action of these relics, which doubly justifies them. For a long, long time, no one could locate the grave of St. Parasceva. Then it happened that a sailor died, and his body was carelessly laid in the proximity of the saint's grave. When the body turned into carrion and began to emit an unbearable stench, a monk who lived nearby summoned the peasants to help him bury the corpse. It happened that they buried him in St. Parasceva's own grave. That night, St. Parasceva appeared in a dream to one of those peasants (George by name) who had buried the corpse. She appeared as a beautiful and exquisitely-adorned queen, surrounded by many glorious soldiers. She said: "George, exhume my relics at once, and lay them in another place; for I can no longer endure the stench from that corpse." Then she told him who she was, and where she was from. The same night a local peasant woman named Euphemia had the same dream. The next day, the peasants began to dig and in fact found the relics of St. Parasceva. They were extraordinarily fragrant, and soon proved to be miracle-working.

Concerning the relics of St. Gervasius and St. Protasius, St. Ambrose relates how their relics were discovered in a similar manner. One night, two handsome youths and an old man appeared to Ambrose, who was awake. He thought that the old man was the Apostle Paul. While the young men remained silent, the old man spoke to Ambrose concerning them, saying that they were Christ's martyrs, and that their relics lay in the very place where Ambrose was praying to God at that time. He went on to say that everything else concerning them would be revealed in a book that Ambrose would find in their grave. The following day, Ambrose recounted his vision and began to dig, and found the relics of both men. From the book that he found he learned that their names were Gervasius and Protasius. In the presence of St. Ambrose, a certain blind man named Severus touched these holy relics and immediately received his sight.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous healings worked by the holy apostles (**Acts 5**):

1. How many signs and miracles were performed through the hands of the apostles;
2. How many of the sick were healed just by the shadow of the Apostle Peter.

HOMILY

-on how the angels do battle for the righteous-

**The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who
fear Him and delivers them (Psalm 34:7).**

The angel of the Lord will do battle for those who fear God. This has been clearly shown many times, as has been recorded; and it has occurred numberless times that have not been recorded. The Archangel Michael took up arms for Joshua, the Son of Nun. An angel did battle for the righteous King Hezekiah and, in one night, destroyed the army of the Chaldeans. How many times have angels visited the Christian apostles and martyrs of in prison, strengthened them, and caused them to rejoice? The consolation of the righteous one comes from knowing that God is All-seeing, and sees his misfortune; that God is Omnipotent, and has power to save him from misfortune; that God is All-merciful, and will save him from misfortune. God will send His radiant angel to the aid of the righteous. The righteous one will not have to struggle against his tyrant, for the angel of God will do battle in his place. When God's angel takes up arms, what army dares confront him? What empire will wage war against him? In an earlier Psalm, the Prophet David says: **No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety (Psalm 33:16-17).**

Hence, it does not help at all if the unjust, the worldly, are allies. When God's angel takes up arms-all will burst as a bubble of water. Even when he was king, David remembered how, as a mere shepherd boy, he killed Goliath, a giant who was armed to the teeth, with a slingshot. On many occasions, David sensed the assistance of God's angel. That is why he could with confidence console the oppressed but righteous ones with these words of comfort and strength: the angel of the Lord encamps around all who fear the Lord, and who serve Him, and an angel of God will deliver them.

O my brethren, let us not doubt these words, but carefully consider, on a daily basis, how the angel of God leaves us in sorrow when we sin, and how he hastens to our assistance with joy and unspeakable power when we repent and implore God's mercy.

O Lord God, our Creator, the King of myriads of angels: forgive us, and save us, and protect us by Thy holy angels.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

OCTOBER -15-

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYR LUCIAN, PRESBYTER OF ANTIOCH

Lucian was born of noble parents in the Syrian city of Samosata. In his youth, he acquired a very broad education, both secular and spiritual. He was a man distinguished in learning, as well as in the austerity of his ascetic life. Having distributed his goods to the poor, Lucian supported himself by compiling instructive works, and thus fed himself by the work of his hands. He performed a great service to the Church in that he corrected many Hebrew texts in Holy Scripture (that heretics, in accordance with their own false teaching, had distorted). Because of his learning and spirituality, he was ordained a presbyter in Antioch. During Maximian's persecution, when St. Anthimus of Nicomedia and St. Peter of Alexandria were tortured, St. Lucian was on the list of those the emperor wanted to kill. Lucian fled the city and hid, but an envious heretical priest, Pancratius, reported him. The persecution was horrible and not even young children were spared. Two boys who did not want to eat food sacrificed to idols were thrown into a boiling bath, where in torments they gave up their holy souls to God. A disciple of Lucian named Pelagia (October 8) preserved her virginal purity from dissolute attackers by praying to God on her roof-top: she gave up her soul to Him, and her body fell from the roof. Lucian was brought to Nicomedia before the emperor. Along the way, his counsels converted forty soldiers to the Christian Faith, and all died a martyr's death. Following interrogation and flogging, St. Lucian was cast into prison where he suffered starvation. St. John Chrysostom writes of St. Lucian: "He scorned hunger: let us also scorn luxury and destroy the power of the stomach that we may, when the time that requires such courage comes for us, be prepared in advance by the help of a lesser asceticism, to show ourselves glorious at the time of battle." He received Holy Communion in prison on the Feast of Theophany, and on the following day rendered his soul to God. St. Lucian suffered on January 7, 311.

2. THE VENERABLE EUTHYMIUS THE NEW

Euthymius was born in Ancyra in 824 of righteous parents, Epiphanius and Anna. He served in the army, married and had one daughter, Anastasia. He lived a strict and long ascetic life in monasteries on Mount Olympus and Mount Athos. For a time he also lived as a stylite near Thessalonica. He founded a monastery for men and a convent for women, near Thessalonica. He entered into rest on an island near the Holy Mountain toward the end of the ninth century. His holy and miracle-working relics repose in Thessalonica.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE MARTYR LUCIAN

Lucian the most wise ascetic and scribe
Boldly walked on the path of Christ.
Against heretics and idolatrous darkness
Lucian the victor waged a bitter struggle.
Planted firmly on the foundation of the Most-holy Trinity-
The Father without beginning, with the Spirit and the Son-
Lucian glorified God in word and deed,
And he confirmed this by his innocent blood.
Savage Rome collapsed, the heresies died;
Works immoral and shameful perished;
The Church raised martyrs up to heaven;
And the Church, great and glorious, outlived all.
This is the Kingdom of saints, the Kingdom without end
That Daniel foretold and Christ founded-
O desired Kingdom, of earthly origin,
With golden domes atop the heavenly roofs!
And holy Lucian, a builder of that Kingdom,
Labored much, and gave all for it.
He now gloriously reigns beside his Jesus,
Borne by God to the angelic flock.

REFLECTION

The saints of God place great importance on receiving Holy Communion before their death. Even though they were sacrificing their lives for Christ the Lord and washing away all their sins by the blood of martyrdom, the martyrs longingly received the Holy Mysteries whenever it was possible. St. Lucian was in prison with several of his disciples and other Christians. On the eve of Theophany, Lucian longed, on such a great Christian feast, to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, for he knew that his death was imminent. Seeing the sincere desire of His sufferer, God Almighty arranged that some Christians pass bread and wine into the prison. When the Feast of Theophany dawned, Lucian called all the Christian prisoners to stand in a circle around him and said to them: "Surround me and be the Church." He had no table, chair, stone or wood in the prison upon which to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. "Holy Father, where shall we place the bread and wine?" they asked Lucian. He lay down in their midst and said: "Place them on my chest, let it be a living altar for the Living God!" And thus the Liturgy was celebrated correctly and prayerfully on the chest of the martyr, and all received Holy Communion. The next day, the emperor sent soldiers to bring Lucian out for torture. When the soldiers opened the door of the prison, St. Lucian cried out three times: "I am a Christian! I am a Christian! I am a Christian!" and with that, he gave up his soul to his God.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous freeing of the apostles from prison (**Acts 5**):

1. How the elders of the Jews cast the apostles into prison;
2. How an angel of God appeared at night, opened the prison, led the apostles out and ordered them to enter the temple and preach the Gospel.

HOMILY

-on how the Lord watches over the bones of the righteous-

He watches over all his bones; not one of them shall be broken (Psalm 34:20).

Let not the righteous be afraid. The All-seeing God watches over them. Can the All-seeing lose or forget something? On the Day of Resurrection, He shall gather all their bodily parts and gloriously resurrect them. The persecutors hurled the bodies of the martyrs into the sea, buried them in deep pits, or left them in fields for the birds to devour. But the Lord, by His divine providence, so guided events that these holy relics came into the hands of the faithful. They were laid honorably in costly reliquaries, churches were built over them, and wonderworking power emanated from them. God wanted to show the faithful by this that He watches over the bones of the righteous, and that He has glorified them in the Heavenly Kingdom. And the Church on earth has affirmed this through the miraculous power of their glorified bodies. Wonderworking relics are like forerunners of the general and glorious resurrection of the righteous. But what if some of the bones of the righteous are burned or ground up-could that be an obstacle to the almighty power of God? Can He not, in the Day of Resurrection, reassemble and enliven them from the scattered ashes? **There shall not an hair of your head perish (Luke 21:18)**, assures the Lord. Nevertheless, if you want to understand "bones" as "works," know then that the works of the unrighteous are as smoke, and the works of the righteous are powerful and as lasting as hard bones. Not even one righteous deed will fade away or disappear in the course of time. God knows them and God watches over them, so that He may reveal them like precious pearls before the assembly of angels and men on that Day.

O All-seeing Lord, Master and Protector of the righteous, multiply our righteous deeds by Thy Holy Spirit, without whom nothing good can be done; and save us by Thy mercy, not according to our deeds.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR LONGINUS

The divine Matthew the Evangelist, in describing the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, says: **Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God (Matthew 27:54).** That centurion was this blessed Longinus, who with two other of his soldiers came to believe in Jesus, the Son of God. Longinus was chief of the soldiers who were present at the Crucifixion of the Lord on Golgotha, and was also the chief of the watch that guarded the tomb. When the Jewish elders learned of the Resurrection of Christ, they bribed the soldiers to spread the false news that Christ did not resurrect, but rather that His disciples stole His body. The Jews also tried to bribe Longinus, but he did not allow himself to be bribed. Then the Jews resorted to their usual strategy: they decided to kill Longinus. Learning of this, Longinus removed his military belt, was baptized with his two companions by an apostle, secretly left Jerusalem and moved to Cappadocia with his companions. There, he devoted himself to fasting and prayer and, as a living witness of Christ's Resurrection, converted many pagans to the true Faith by his witness. After that, he withdrew to a village on the estate of his father. Even there, however, the malice of the Jews did not leave him in peace. Due to the calumnies of the Jews, Pilate dispatched soldiers to behead Longinus. St. Longinus foresaw in the spirit the approach of his executioners and went out to meet them. He brought them to his home, not telling them who he was. He was a good host to the soldiers, and soon they lay down to sleep. But St. Longinus stood up to pray, and prayed all night long, preparing himself for death. In the morning, he called his two companions to him, clothed himself in white burial clothes, and instructed the other members of his household to bury him on a particular small hill. He then went to the soldiers and told them that he was that Longinus whom they were seeking. The soldiers were perplexed and ashamed, and could not even contemplate beheading Longinus, but he insisted that they fulfill the order of their superior. Thus, Longinus and his two companions were beheaded. The soldiers took Longinus's head to Pilate, and he turned it over to the Jews. They threw it on a dung heap outside the city.

2. THE VENERABLE LONGINUS, THE LOVER OF LABOR

Longinus was a monk of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves in the fourteenth century. He was the gatekeeper of the monastery, and had such a pure and grace-filled heart that he always knew the thoughts of those who were entering the monastery and of those who were leaving the monastery. The miracle-working relics of Longinus repose in the Cave of St. Theodosius.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR LONGINUS

St. Longinus stood beneath the Cross
When, on the Cross, Christ breathed His last.
Longinus beheld the wrath of the mild sky,
Witnessed the earth as it shook,
And the bright sun as it lost its rays
And clothed the whole world in darkness.
The tombs of many were opened,
And many of the dead appeared alive.
Brave Longinus was filled with fear,
And exclaimed with a remorseful sigh:
"This Man was the Son of God!
Sinful men have crucified the Innocent One!"
Next to him, two other soldiers
Echoed the exclamation of their centurion.
Longinus was a witness of the Resurrection,
And he could attest to His humiliation as well.
An eyewitness, a true witness,
Longinus desired to not conceal the truth,
But proclaimed it everywhere he went,
And glorified the resurrected Christ God!
To his death he remained Christ's soldier;
And for Christ, Longinus gave his head.

REFLECTION

The first appearance of the Holy Martyr Longinus was as follows: Much time had passed since his martyrdom when it happened that a widow in Cappadocia became blind. The doctors were unable to do anything at all for her. Suddenly, the thought came to her to go to Jerusalem and venerate the holy places there, hoping that she might find help. She had an only son, a boy, who served as her guide, but as soon as they arrived in Jerusalem, her son died of an illness. Oh, how immeasurable was her sorrow! Having lost her eyes, she now lost her only son, whose eyes had guided her. But in her pain and sorrow, St. Longinus appeared to her and comforted her with the promise that he would restore her sight and reveal to her the heavenly glory in which her son now dwelt. Longinus told her everything about himself, and told her to go outside the city walls to the dung heap, and there to dig up his head, and that she herself would see what would happen next. The woman arose and, stumbling, somehow managed to get out of the city. She cried out for someone to lead her to the dung heap and to leave her there. When she was led to the dung heap, she bent down and began to dig with her hands, having a strong faith that she would find that for which the saint asked. As she was digging, she touched the holy martyr's buried head, and her eyes were opened, and she saw a man's head beneath her hands. Filled with gratitude to God and great joy, she took the head of St. Longinus, washed it, censed it, and placed it in her home as the most precious treasure on earth.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the courage of St. Stephen the Archdeacon in confessing Christ (**Acts 7**):

1. How St. Stephen enumerated the miracles and mercies of God toward the people of Israel throughout the ages;
2. How he denounced the opposition to God and the evil doings of the Jewish elders;
3. How he called them betrayers and murderers of Christ.

HOMILY

-on the mountains and depths of God-

Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; Thy judgments are a great deep (Psalm 36:6).

The mountains of God's righteousness cut through all the distances of time and space, rising up from earth to heaven; and from the clouds of time they ascend to the clearness of eternity. Are not the saints the bearers of God's righteousness? See how they cut through time and space! Born in time, they now rejoice in eternity. Living in eternity, they come down to us in time, and help us like strong brothers help their weaker brothers. They lived on earth in a finite space and now the whole universe glorifies them. On all five continents of the world, churches are built in honor of the apostles, martyrs, and the rest of God's righteous ones. Such are the mountains of God's righteousness: you cannot limit them, you cannot encompass them, and you cannot measure them with any measure in this world. What other mountains can compare with the mountains of God? What other men can compare with the men of God? What other glory can compare with the glory of those whom God glorifies? O my brethren, let us rejoice in the righteousness of God and let us make glad in the lofty mountains of God's righteousness!

Thy judgments are a great deep. That is, the judgments of Thy providence are as unfathomable as a great deep. Thou didst cast Job upon a dung heap in order to glorify him; Thou didst raise Saul on the throne, that he might plunge himself into destruction; Thou hast mercy on the sinner, and Thou givest him abundance and health, that he may repent; Thou chastenest the righteous, in order to strengthen him in faith and hope!

Thy Holy Church is the greatest mountain of Thy righteousness, the source of many mountains. Thy Holy Church, O God, searches Thy judgments and Thy ways, and her wisdom is great and as sweet as a honeycomb filled with honey.

O Lord, disperse the clouds of malice from our hearts, that we may know Thy judgments and see Thy ways.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET HOSEA

Hosea was the son of Beeri of the tribe of Issachar. Hosea lived and prophesied more than eight hundred years before the birth of Christ. His divinely inspired words are found in his book, which contains fourteen chapters. He strongly rebuked Israel and Judah for their idolatry and also foretold God's punishment for their sins, the destruction of Samaria and Israel for their apostasy, and God's mercy on the tribe of Judah. He foretold the abolition and the end of the sacrifices of the Old Testament. He foretold the coming of the Lord, and the richness of gifts that He would bring with Him to earth. He lived to a very old age and entered peacefully into rest.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS COSMAS AND DAMIAN, THE UNMERCENARIES

There are three pairs of holy physicians by the name of Cosmas and Damian. The first entered into rest peacefully on November 1, the second pair was stoned in Rome on July 1, and the third was from Arabia; and it is these that we speak of under today's date. They were physicians by profession, and when they received the Christian Faith, they healed the sick in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They became widely known for their miraculous healings. The malicious pagans seized them, and took them before Governor Lysias in the town of Aegea. Since neither of these brothers would renounce Christ at any cost, they were cast into the sea, then into fire, but the omnipotent God saved them from both the water and the fire. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and saved them. The pagan governor ascribed this to their alleged sorcery but they answered: "We know nothing of sorcery nor do we need sorcery, but we possess the power of Christ-which saves us and all who invoke His Most-holy Name." The pagans struck them with stones but the stones bounced off them; they shot them with arrows, but the arrows rebounded as well. Finally, they were beheaded with the sword. Saints Leontius, Anthimus and Eutropius also suffered with them, and received heavenly wreaths of glory. They suffered in the time of Diocletian and Maximian. Many miracles were manifested from their holy relics, even as miracles abounded from them during their life.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR ANDREW

St. Andrew was a Cretan by birth and a Christian priest. In the time of the iconoclastic persecution, he showed himself to be a great defender of the veneration of icons. Andrew went to Constantinople to denounce the wicked Emperor Copronymus. As the emperor stood in the Church of the Holy Martyr Mamas, Andrew entered the church, stood before him, and openly rebuked him before all. "It would be better for you, O Emperor, to attend to military matters and to govern the people, than to persecute Christ and His servants." For this, St. Andrew was beaten severely, tortured and dragged through the streets, where a heretic struck him with an axe and killed him. Thus, Andrew rendered his holy soul to God in the year 767. His relics gave healing to the sick.

4. SAINT LAZARUS THE FOUR-DAYS-DEAD

Lazarus's principle feasts are on March 17 and Lazarus Saturday during Great Lent. Under today's date is commemorated the translation of his relics from the island of Cyprus to Constantinople. This occurred when Emperor Leo the Wise built the Church of St. Lazarus in Constantinople, and translated Lazarus's relics there in the year 890. When, after almost a thousand years, Lazarus's grave in the town of Kition on Cyprus was unearthed, a marble tablet was found with the inscription: "Lazarus of the Four Days, the friend of Christ."

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROPHET HOSEA

The discerning Prophet Hosea cried out
And prophesied tribulation to the sinful nation:
"The Lord, the Lord saith: Mercy is dear to Me,
But sacrifices, filthy and rotten, are not dear.
Ye transgress the Law, as did Adam of old,
Ye worship lies, and a falsehood is lord over you.
Your sacrifices are finished; I will not accept them.
Now I shall prepare the greatest sacrifice for Myself.
Ye have planted godlessness; iniquity have ye reaped.
Ye have sown wind, and harvested a storm.
But if ye now plant righteousness, ye will reap mercy-
And to Me, ye will be a holy people again.
But ye are ashamed of Me and love idols.
Ye encourage adultery, ye encourage sin!
That is why ye shall wander throughout the world,
And every nation shall be more powerful than you.
And I will raise up a New Israel:
A new Kingdom-a Kingdom of saints.
It will be as the dew and as a blossoming lily,
And its most wondrous fragrance shall fill the world.
I am the Lord, the Lord; whatever I desire I can do!
Blessed are those who worship Me, the Living God."

REFLECTION

The second appearance of the Holy Martyr Longinus: When Longinus appeared to the blind widow whose son had died, he promised to restore her sight and to reveal her son in great glory. Finding the relics of the holy martyr and touching them with her hands, the widow immediately regained her sight, and thus, one promise was fulfilled. The following night, St. Longinus appeared to the widow in radiant attire, holding her son by the hand, who was also clothed resplendently. Caressing the child like a father, Longinus said: "Woman, behold your son for whom you weep so much! Look at the honor and glory given him; look and be comforted. God has numbered him among the heavenly ranks who live in His Kingdom. I have now brought him from the Savior, and he will never be parted from me. Take my head and your son's body, and bury them together in one coffin. Mourn your son no longer, and let not your heart be troubled, for great glory, joy, and endless rejoicing is given him from God." Seeing and hearing all this, the woman was filled with great joy, and she returned to her home, saying to herself: "I asked for bodily eyes and I found spiritual eyes. I was saddened at the death of my son, and now I have him in heaven, where he remains in glory with the prophets and rejoices with them unceasingly."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous vision of St. Stephen the Archdeacon and Protomartyr (Acts 7):

1. How Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, saw the heavens opened;
2. How he said: **Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:56);**
3. How the Jews stoned him.

HOMILY

-on the festering wounds of sin-

My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness (Psalm 38:5).

The prophet speaks of the wounds of sins that he himself committed, and from which he sensed in himself the stench of sin. As much as this acknowledgment reveals the impurity of previous sins, so is the subsequent purity of the repentant one also shown. For as long as man follows the corrupt path of sin, he does not sense its suffocating stench; but when he withdraws from this path and sets off on the pure path of righteousness, he senses the inexpressible difference between purity and impurity, between the path of virtue and the path of vice. Imagine a man who has spent the night in a stinking tavern and finds himself in a garden of roses the next morning. In the former there was stench, poison, debasement of soul and body, anger, discord, and the tormenting of himself and others. In the latter is God's great sun overhead, beautiful flowers everywhere, fresh air, wondrous fragrance, serenity and health. Imagine this, and understand that there is an even greater difference between the path of sin and the path of God. **My wounds are foul and festering.** Thus the great king describes the fruits of his sinful past. Nothing is as foul as sin, nothing festers as much and nothing spreads as much as sin. The stench of bodily wounds suggests, in only a small way, the unbearable stench of a sinful soul. That is why every holy thing distances itself from such a soul. The pure heavenly spirits hide from such a one, and the impure spirits of hades seek its company. Every new sin is a fresh wound on the soul; every sin is corruption and stench. How does sin arise? From my **foolishness** explains the prophet. A mind derailed from its divine track leads man to sin. Until the mind is cleansed, man cannot be cleansed. **But we have the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16)**, says the Apostle. In other words, we have a mind put back on track, as was Adam's mind before the sinful stench. Hence brethren, all Orthodox teaching on asceticism concentrates on one main point: on the mind of man; on the cleansing and correcting of the mind.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Purity and eternal Source of purity, help us to reject our foolishness; help us to reason according to Thy mind.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST LUKE

Luke was born in Antioch. In his youth, he excelled in his studies of Greek philosophy, medicine and art. During the ministry of the Lord Jesus on earth, Luke came to Jerusalem, where he saw the Savior face to face, heard His saving teaching and was witness to His miraculous works. Coming to belief in the Lord, St. Luke was numbered among the Seventy Apostles, and was sent out to preach. With Cleopas, he saw the resurrected Lord on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24**). After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Luke returned to Antioch and there became a fellow worker of the Apostle Paul and traveled to Rome with him, converting Jews and pagans to the Christian Faith. **Luke, the beloved physician, ... greets you**, writes the Apostle Paul to the Colossians. (**Colossians 4:14**). At the request of Christians, he wrote his Gospel in about the year 60. Following the martyrdom of the great Apostle Paul, St. Luke preached the Gospel throughout Italy, Dalmatia, Macedonia and other regions. He painted icons of the Most-holy Theotokos-not just one, but three-and icons of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Hence, St. Luke is considered to be the founder of Christian iconography. In old age, he visited Libya and Upper Egypt. From Egypt he returned to Greece, where he continued to preach and convert many with great zeal despite his old age. In addition to his Gospel, St. Luke wrote the Acts and dedicated both works to Theophilus, the governor of Achaia. Luke was eighty-four years old when the wicked idolaters tortured him for the sake of Christ and hanged him from an olive tree in the town of Thebes, in Boethia. The miracle-working relics of this wonderful saint were transported to Constantinople in the reign of Emperor Constantius, the son of Constantine.

2. SAINT PETER OF CETINJE, METROPOLITAN OF MONTENEGRO

Peter was born on April 1, 1749, in the village of Njegu . He entered the monastic order at the age of twelve. Following the death of Metropolitan Sava in 1782, Peter became the Metropolitan and ruler of Montenegro. This glorious man dedicated his entire holy life to his people. He worked with all his strength to reconcile the quarreling clans of Montenegro, and strove mightily to defend the land and people from greedy aggressors. He succeeded in both tasks. He is especially glorified for his victory over Napoleon's army in Boka and Dalmatia. He was very strict with himself, and with everyone else he was just and condescending. Peter lived in a small cell like a simple monk even though he was a prince over the people. He reposed on October 18, 1830. His miracle-working relics repose, incorrupt, in the Monastery of Cetinje. The Lord glorified him in the heavens and on earth as His faithful and long-suffering servant.

3. SAINTS JULIAN AND DIDYMUS THE BLIND

St. Julian, called the "Hermit," was a Persian and an unlearned peasant, but because of the purity of his heart he was a vessel of the grace of the Holy Spirit. He lived a life of asceticism beside the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia, and possessed the gift of clairvoyance. In the same moment that Julian the Apostate perished, St. Julian discerned this in the spirit, and declared it to his disciples. St. Didymus the Blind was his contemporary. He lived in Alexandria, and also perceived in the spirit the death of Julian. St. Didymus was at prayer during the night when a voice came to him from heaven, saying: "Today the Emperor Julian is no more, inform Patriarch Athanasius of this." St. Anthony the Great greatly respected this wondrous blind saint who had the spirit of discernment. He stayed with him and prayed to God with him whenever he came to Alexandria from the desert. Both St. Julian and St. Didymus, wonderful servants of God, entered into rest some time after the year 362.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT LUKE THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

The divine Luke, both wise and learned,
Was tortured willingly for the Lord.
He could have avoided mockery and torture,
But the world would not have had the great Luke.
The young Luke beheld God's truth
And surrendered his heart to the Son of God.
He hearkened to the Teacher, beheld the Wonderworker,
And in Him he recognized the Immortal Creator.
He beheld the Resurrected One, and spoke with Him,
And worked miracles in His name.
Christ became his only joy,
And Luke sacrificed his mind, wealth and youth to Him.
When Luke became old, he was young in Christ,
And gave to the world what he received from the Lord.
And when he had given the world all he could give,
Then the world, fulfilling the Scripture, repaid him with contempt.
From an old olive tree the aged Luke hung,
With a smile on his face and his arms folded crosswise.
And the hand of Christ came down from heaven
And received the soul of His Evangelist.
Now, in radiant Paradise with the other apostles,
St. Luke prays for the Holy Church.

REFLECTION

Can a sinner repent of his sins in ten days? According to the immeasurable compassion of God he can. During the reign of Emperor Maurice, there was a well-known bandit in the vicinity of Constantinople. He inspired fear and trembling both within the capital and without. One day, the Emperor Maurice himself sent the robber a cross as a sign of faith that he would do him no harm if he surrendered. The robber took the cross and surrendered. Arriving in Constantinople, he fell before the feet of the emperor and begged for forgiveness. The emperor kept his word, had mercy on him and released him. Immediately after that, the robber became gravely ill and sensed that death was drawing near. He bitterly repented of all his sins and tearfully prayed to God that He forgive him, as the emperor had forgiven him. He shed so many tears at prayer that his handkerchief was completely soaked. After ten days of weeping and praying, the repentant man reposed. The same night he passed away, his physician saw a wondrous vision in a dream: when the robber had given up his soul, there gathered around him black, manlike demons with pieces of paper on which were written all his sins. Two radiant angels also appeared. The angels set a scale between them, and the joyful demons placed all those papers on it, weighing down their side of the scale; but the other side was empty. The angels held counsel: ``What shall we place on it? Let us seek something good in his life!" And then that handkerchief soaked with tears of repentance appeared in the hands of one angel. The angels quickly placed it on their side of the scale and it outweighed all the demons' papers. Then the black demons fled, howling sorrowfully, and the angels took the soul of the repentant thief and carried it to Paradise, glorifying the man-loving God.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the miracle of the Apostle Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (**Acts 8**):

1. How an angel guided Philip from Samaria to the road into Gaza;
2. How Philip saw the eunuch of Queen Candace, explained to him the prophecy of Isaiah, and baptized him;
3. How an angel made Philip invisible to the eunuch, and transported him instantly to the town of Azotus.

HOMILY

-on the sins of the tongue-

I said, I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue (Psalm 39:1).

The sin of the tongue is the most common and most frequent sin. **If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man**, says the Apostle James (**James 3:2**). When a penitent sets out on God's path-when he begins to live according to God's commandments-he should first strive to avoid sin with the tongue. That was the rule that the penitent David laid down for himself. He vowed especially to remain silent before his adversaries: **I will restrain my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked are before me (Psalm 39:1)**. Behold a most wonderful rule for one who is being healed of sin. When he is accused, he does not reply; when he is slandered, he remains silent. In truth, what does it help to speak with an enraged, unrighteous man who does not love God more than himself? If you speak to him of evil, you will enrage him even more. If you speak to him of good, you will make him a mocker of holy things. Before Pilate Christ remained silent. Pilate said: **Answerest Thou nothing? (Mark 15:4)**. What can He reply to you, when you do not have ears to hear or a mind to understand? Behold, the silence of the righteous one before the unrighteous one can still have the best influence on the unrighteous one. Left to interpret the silence of the righteous one by himself, the unrighteous one can interpret it for the benefit of his soul; while any other answer, good or bad, will be interpreted for evil, to the condemnation of others and to the justification of himself. Blessed is he who learns to govern his tongue.

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, Thou Who hast shown us by example how and when to speak, Thou hast shown us by example how and when we should be silent. Help us, by Thy Holy Spirit, that we not sin with the tongue.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET JOEL

Joel is second in the line of the minor prophets. St. Joel was the son of Phanuel, from the tribe of Reuben. He lived eight hundred years before Christ. Joel prophesied the misfortunes of the people of Israel, and the Babylonian Captivity because of the sins they had committed in the sight of God. He called the people to fasting and the priests to tearful penitential prayer, that God would have mercy on them: **Sanctify ye a fast ... and cry unto the Lord (Joel 1:14); Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar (Joel 2:17).** Joel also foretold the Descent of the Spirit of God upon the apostles and the pouring out of the grace of the Spirit of God upon all Christians: **Then afterward I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28).** He prophesied and described the Dread Judgment of God, and also prophesied the glory of God's Holy Church.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR VARUS

Varus was a Roman officer in Egypt and also secretly a Christian. When seven Christian teachers were cast into prison, Varus visited them, supplying them with necessities and ministering to them zealously. He was amazed at these martyrs and grieved that because of his fear he could not become a martyr for Christ. The men of God encouraged him, and Varus decided that he would go with them to be tortured. One of these men of God died in prison, so that when the wicked eparch had the martyrs brought before him, there were only six remaining. He inquired as to the seventh. Varus said to him: "I am the seventh." The enraged governor tortured Varus first. He commanded that he be flogged with dry rods naked, and after that had him tied to a tree and sliced apart piece by piece until the saint gave his holy soul to God. His body was thrown on a dung heap. A Palestinian woman named Cleopatra, the widow of an officer, was there with her son John. She secretly took Varus's holy relics from the dung heap and buried them in her house. Then she begged permission from the eparch to take the body of her deceased husband from Egypt to Palestine. As she was the wife of an officer, the eparch immediately gave his permission. However, the blessed Christian Cleopatra did not take the body of her husband but the relics of the Holy Martyr Varus instead. Thus, she brought the martyr's relics to Edras (the village of her birth) near Mount Tabor, and buried them with honor there. Afterward, she built a church to St. Varus and he often appeared to her from the other world, resplendent as an angel of God.

3. THE VENERABLE PROCHORUS OF PCHINJA

St. Prochorus was a contemporary and friend of Saints John of Rila and Gabriel of Lesnov. According to his prayer, God showed him the place where he would live a life of asceticism. This place was a wooded area near the River Pchinja. Here Prochorus labored in asceticism to his old age and repose. Only the One All-seeing God knows the extent of Prochorus's labors and the temptations he endured in the course of his asceticism. But one can judge by his myrrh-gushing relics and his numberless miraculous healings-which have continued up to today-the greatness of his asceticism and the greatness of God's grace which was given to him because of his great labors. St. Prochorus entered into rest and took up his abode in the Kingdom of God in the eleventh century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE PROCHORUS OF PCHINJA

From his early youth, holy Father Prochorus
Hid from the world and from vanity,
Diligently working with fasting and sweat,
Until his soul was raised up and bound to God.
His companions were beasts of the forest;
Resplendent angels were his protection;
The saints of God were astonished at him,
For St. Prochorus attained all that they had attained.
God gave him abundant grace:
Great and powerful authority over demons,
Power over infirmity and varied sufferings,
Help for the sorrowing by his prayers.
By labors, Prochorus seized heaven,
And of the Heavenly Kingdom he became worthy.
He made himself worthy, and helps others
Who seek to enter into the Kingdom.
The temporal he cast off; the eternal he embraced;
And he paid a small price for the precious treasure.
The wonderworker Prochorus is in Paradise-
In heavenly splendor, now entirely aglow.
And he helps those who pray to him,
Those who believe in and love Christ our God.

REFLECTION

An appearance of the Holy Martyr Varus: When the devout widow Cleopatra built a church to him, she summoned the bishop and priests to consecrate it. A large number of Christians gathered for this celebration, for the entire countryside venerated St. Varus as a great healer and miracle-worker. Following the divine services, this pious benefactress went before the relics of St. Varus and prayed: "I beseech you-you who endured much suffering for Christ-implore God for that which is pleasing to Him; and for me and my only son, ask that which is beneficial." Cleopatra's son John was ready for the army. Just as she left the church, John became ill. He was seized with a burning fever that grew steadily worse until, around midnight, John died. The grief-stricken, furious mother came before the tomb of St. Varus and spoke sharply: "O saint of God! Is this the way you help me?" and she said much more in her bitter lamentation until, utterly exhausted, she fell into a light sleep. St. Varus appeared to her with her son John. Both were radiant as the sun in garments whiter than snow, bound with golden girdles, and had magnificent wreaths on their heads. God's saint said to her: "Did you not pray to me to implore God for whatever was pleasing to Him, and beneficial to you and your son? I prayed to God and He, in His unspeakable goodness, took your son into His heavenly army. If you so desire, here he is: take him and place him in the army of the earthly king." Hearing this, the young John embraced St. Varus and said: "No, my Lord, do not listen to my mother and do not send me back into the world-full of unrighteousness and iniquity-from which you have delivered me." Awakening from the dream, Cleopatra felt great joy in her heart and left the church. She lived near the church for seven years, and St. Varus often appeared to her with John.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Saul's wondrous conversion to the Christian Faith (**Acts 9**):

1. How Saul set out to persecute Christians in Damascus;
2. How a light shone down from heaven and He heard the voice of Christ.

HOMILY

-on the soul's thirst for God-

My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God: When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:2).

When only a spark of love for God shines in the heart of man, he should not extinguish it but let it burn, and he will see a miracle. That spark will flare up into a torch of unseen radiance, and the light and its warmth will be very great. In the light of his love for God, a man will feel his life in this world to be as darkness; and from the warmth of his love for God, he will feel an unquenchable thirst for God, a thirst to be closer to God, a thirst for seeing God. David, the lover of God, compares this thirst to the thirst of a deer who races to springs of water. **My soul thirsts for God, for the Living God.** Is not everything around us infirm? Does not everything around us quickly decay? We grab at shadows, we embrace corpses. We pay today for tomorrow's stench-we pay with gold and silver, sometimes with our honor and conscience, and at times even with our life-for the stench of tomorrow's decay! This is not love but animal lust. A great soul seeks a subject worthy of love, seeks a subject not susceptible to destruction, decay, decomposition and the filth of transient bodies. That is why King David, the lover of God, emphasizes **the Living God**. For who, in truth, is mighty and alive save God? God endowed His angels and saints with strength and life: yet all of it is His, and from Him. **When shall I come and appear before God?** Here is the irresistible yearning of true love for God. Shame on all who say that they believe in God, and love God, while the very thought of death-of leaving this world-drives them wild with fear.

O Lord our God, holy, mighty and living-the Source of holiness, the Source of strength, the Source of life-illumine us and warm us with love for Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR ARTEMIUS

This glorious saint was an Egyptian by birth and the chief commander under Emperor Constantine the Great. When the victorious Cross, surrounded by stars, appeared to Emperor Constantine, Artemius also saw that Cross, believed in the Lord Christ and was baptized. Later, during the reign of Emperor Constantius, this emperor sent him to Greece to remove the relics of St. Andrew from Patras and St. Luke from Thebes, and to take them to Constantinople. Commander Artemius carried this out with joy. After that, Artemius was appointed as augustalis and imperial prefect in Egypt. He remained in this position during the reign of Constantius, and for a period of time under Emperor Julian the Apostate. When the apostate emperor went to war against the Persians, he came through Antioch and commanded Artemius to come to Antioch with his army. Artemius came. Then the emperor subjected two Christian priests, Eugenius and Macarius, to torture. Seeing this, Artemius became greatly disturbed and, facing the emperor, said: "Why, O Emperor, why do you inhumanly torture these innocent and dedicated men of God, and why do you force them to renounce the Orthodox Faith?" Artemius continued, prophesying: "Your death is near." The enraged emperor sent those two honorable priests into exile to Arabia, where they died shortly thereafter. He then stripped Commander Artemius of his military rank and ordered him to be flogged and torn asunder. Thoroughly wounded and bloodied, Artemius was thrown into prison, where the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared to him, and healed and comforted him. Then the emperor commanded that he be spread out on a stone, and that another heavy stone be placed upon him, so that his body would be smashed flat as a board. Finally, St. Artemius was beheaded. It was the year 362. Emperor Julian went out against the Persians and perished dishonorably, as St. Artemius had foretold.

2. THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS ARTEMIUS

Artemius was born in 1532, the son of Russian peasants Cosmas and Apollinaria, from the village of Verkola in the region of Dvina. Even at the age of five, he differed from other children by his rare piety and meekness. When he was thirteen, the child walked with his father through a great forest in severe weather and reposed there. Unable to dig a grave, his grieving father covered his body with branches and departed. Twenty-eight years later, a man saw an unearthly light in the forest. Upon approaching the light, he found the body of Artemius intact and incorrupt. Many of the sick were healed of illnesses as soon as they touched the body of St. Artemius. His holy relics repose in a monastery near Pinega, in the Province of Archangelsk.

3. THE VENERABLE GERASIMUS THE NEW

Gerasimus was from Trikala in the Peloponnese of the prominent Notaras family. He was born in 1509. He lived a life of asceticism on Mount Athos, and then in Palestine, where he fasted for forty days. After that, he settled on the island of Cephalonia, where he founded a convent. By his prayer he brought down rain, healed the sick, and foretold the future. He rested in the Lord on August 15, 1579. Gerasimus was a miracle-worker both during his life and after his repose.

4. THE VENERABLE NEW MARTYR IGNATIUS

Ignatius was from the Bulgarian region of Eski-Zagora. This is that glorious region of Zagora that has given the Church of God many holy ascetics and martyrs. He lived a life of asceticism in the Skete of St. John the Forerunner on Mount Athos. He willingly gave himself to the Turks to be tortured for Christ, and was hanged in Constantinople on October 8, 1814. His relics are miracle-working, and his head is honorably preserved in the Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR ARTEMIUS

**St. Artemius the commander
Did not hide his faith before the emperor,
But proclaimed his faith with great courage
And glorified Christ God before the emperor.
This apostate emperor forgot God,
And subjected his commander to torment.
The saint dedicated his mind to God
And little felt the cruel tortures,
Since there is a greater suffering for the sinner who tortures
Than for the righteous one being tortured!
The emperor beheaded this glorious commander
But the Lord glorified His servant
And raised him up to the Heavenly Kingdom.
He gave him power to drive out demons,
Grace to heal every sickness and suffering-
All by the power of God, without labor or word.
Whoever loves and believes in Christ,
Has a champion in St. Artemius.**

REFLECTION

The compassionate God wonderfully guides those who give themselves over to His holy will and care. Just as a candle-maker makes whatever kind of candle he wants from soft wax, so the All-wise God makes immortal lights in the Heavenly Kingdom of His devoted servants. St. Ignatius the New Martyr was totally devoted to God, even as a child. He yearned to become a monk and to be a martyr for the Faith. During the Karageorge uprising, the Turkish army was conscripting men throughout Bulgaria to fight against the Serbs, and even came to the house of Ignatius's father, George, to see if anyone there was fit for military service. Seeing that George was a well-built and strong man, they wanted to take him into the army. But George resolutely said: "I cannot fight against my fellow Christians." The infuriated Turks killed him on the spot. The young Ignatius hid in a neighboring house, then fled to Romania, but his desire for monasticism took him to the Holy Mountain. Even so, he wanted something more than monasticism—he desired martyrdom. He prayed with tears one night before the icon of the Most-holy Theotokos, imploring her to grant him the path of martyrdom. He heard a sound in front of him, and opened his eyes to see the glowing halo detach itself from the icon and rest upon his head. Shortly after that, he suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Turks, and received the wreath of eternal glory.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Lord's wondrous appearance to the Apostle Ananias and to Saul (**Acts 9**):

1. How the Lord appeared to Ananias and directed him to Saul in the street called Straight;
2. How, at that very moment, in a vision, Saul saw Ananias healing him of his blindness.

HOMILY

-on old and new tales of God's wonders-

**We have heard with our ears, O God; Our fathers
have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in
the times of old (Psalm 44:1).**

Thus King David speaks in the name of his people, and enumerates several great works that God performed for Israel. We, brethren, have also heard of all these works, from Holy Scripture, and of many more works and kinds of works than those of which David had heard, for they took place after him! Have we not heard of incomparably more miraculous and greater works of God's providence and God's love for mankind than all that David heard? The Son of God became incarnate of the Most-pure Virgin and lived as a man among men, poured out wisdom, worked miracles, destroyed death, put the devil to shame, and gave power to His followers. David did not hear of these things, but we have heard, for they have been revealed to us by our spiritual Fathers: the apostles and evangelists, martyrs and righteous ones, and all the ranks of saints from ancient times to the present day. Not only did they reveal it to us, but the Holy Spirit reveals it to us every day through the Holy Church, through the grace-filled Mysteries and through countless miracles. Behold, here is a reason for great joy, but also for great fear, for much is given to us and much will be required of us. We have been given more spiritual riches than all those who lived before Christ—more wisdom and understanding, more of God's glory and power, and more, many more examples of God's love for man and man's love for God. Ask yourselves, you richest of the rich, what have you given and what are you giving to God for all of this? You should strive to not be put to shame at God's Judgment. As a dream soon slips away, so will all your days on earth soon slip away, and the sound of the angel's trumpet will soon summon all nations and people to the Dread Judgment of God. Strive that you not then be ashamed, for you will not be able to excuse yourself with "We did not know," or "We did not have!" You know, and you have had more revealed to you, than even David and Solomon had; and more will be required of you than of them.

O Son of God, our great and wonderful Lord, God and Savior, remind us every day and every hour of Thy Precious Blood, shed for us, that we do not forget, O Lord, and that we not be eternally condemned.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE HILARION THE GREAT

Like a rose growing among thorns, this great saint was born of pagan parents in the village of Tabatha near Gaza in Palestine. His parents sent him to study in Alexandria, where the gifted youngster quickly assimilated both secular learning and spiritual wisdom. Coming to know the Lord Christ, he was baptized, and desired to dedicate himself completely to the service of the Lord. With this desire in his heart, Hilarion visited St. Anthony in the desert and became his disciple. Then he returned to his homeland and lived a life of asceticism near Maiuma, at Gaza. Demons tried to terrify him in various ways, but by prayer to God and the sign of the Cross he always overcame them and drove them away. Many lovers of the spiritual life gathered around him. Hilarion became for Palestine what St. Anthony was for Egypt. A divine teacher, a strict ascetic and a wonderful miracle-worker, Hilarion was revered not only by Christians but also by pagans. However, fearing the praise of men and tearfully lamenting, "Woe is me, I have received my reward on earth!" he fled from place to place, to hide from men and remain alone with his soul and with God. Thus, he traveled and lived in Egypt, Sicily, Dalmatia and finally in Cyprus, where his life of great labor came to an end in about the year 372, at the age of eighty. The miracle-working relics of St. Hilarion were translated to Palestine by his disciple Hesychius, and were placed in the monastery founded by him.

2. SAINT HILARION, BISHOP OF MEGLIN

He was born of eminent and devout parents. His childless mother had long prayed to God that He grant her a child, and in accordance with her prayer, the Most-holy Theotokos appeared to her and comforted her with the words: "Do not grieve, you will give birth to a son and he will turn many to the light of truth." When Hilarion was three years old, the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth!" was constantly on his lips. He was well-educated, was tonsured a monk at age eighteen, and founded a monastery based on the Rule of St. Pachomius. In 1134, he was consecrated Bishop of Meglin by Eustathius, Archbishop of Trnovo. St. Hilarion led a great, nearly lifelong struggle against the Bogomils and the Armenian heretics. However, by his spiritual learning and unequaled sanctity he put them all to shame, and drew many of them to Orthodoxy. He reposed peacefully, and took up his abode in the Kingdom of His Lord in the year 1164.

3. THE VENERABLE PHILOTHEUS

He was born in Crysopolis in Macedonia. The Turks took him from his mother, a widow, and threw him and one of his brothers into prison. The Most-holy Theotokos miraculously saved them from prison and brought them to a monastery at Neapolis in Asia Minor. Later, their mother found both of her sons as monks, and she herself was tonsured a nun. Philotheus went to Mount Athos, where he lived a life of asceticism in the Monastery of Dionysiou, and later in the desert. He was a wondrous ascetic and a great conqueror of demonic powers. He reposed peacefully at the age of eighty-four. He willed that he not be buried, but that his body be thrown into the forest for the birds and wild beasts. Later, a fisherman saw a great light in the forest on a cold night and went to warm himself, thinking it was a fire. However, the light was not from a fire, but was emanating from the wonderworking relics of St. Philotheus.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE HILARION THE GREAT

Holy Hilarion, like a brilliant comet,
Fleeing from men, traveled half the world.
But such a star hides in vain:
Its own light reveals it to the world.
Hilarion wished to escape earthly glory,
But from glory the saint could not flee.
Where God did not proclaim him, the demons did,
Being terrified by the saint, who cast them out.
Wherever he settled, Hilarion the Wonderful
Worked miracles and healed the sick,
Conquered his weakness and passions.
A conqueror of the world, he subdued the demons.
He hid in caves, yet was proclaimed by all.
He shunned all, but was glorified by all.
The Lord glorifies His glorifiers,
And crowns victorious runners with wreaths.
When the race of earthly life passes,
The wreaths of everlasting life are given.
The aged Hilarion, ever young in spirit,
Now takes delight in the Lord face to face.
Even now his prayers wage war for us,
That in His compassion the Lord would have mercy on us.

REFLECTION

The All-seeing eye of God watches over all men and, in a wondrous manner, guides the faithful to salvation. That which seems to the faithful a great loss can show itself over time to be a great gain. The case of St. Philotheus and his brother, who were lost to their mother, is similar to the case of St. Xenophont (January 26), and the case of St. Eustathius and his wife and sons (September 20). When St. Philotheus and his brother were sitting in a Turkish prison in Macedonia, the Most-holy Theotokos appeared to them in the form of their mother and said, "Arise, my dear children, and follow me!" and suddenly the young men found themselves in a monastery in the town of Neapolis in Asia Minor. When the young men related to the abbot what had happened to them, he understood that this was from God, and he received the young men and tonsured them. A long time passed after this. Their mother grieved for them but overcame her loss. Finally, she decided to enter a convent and dedicate herself to God. God's providence brought her near the monastery where her sons were. Once, during the patronal celebration of this monastery she came with the other nuns for the celebration. She saw her sons in church but did not recognize them. Just then, one of the brothers called the other by his secular name. The mother's heart was touched by that name, which was dear to her, and she looked carefully into their faces. Then she recognized them and they recognized her. Their joy was exceedingly great, and they gave heartfelt thanks to God. Believing Christians should not despair over even the greatest loss.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous healing of the blind Saul by Ananias (**Acts 9**):

1. How Ananias placed his hands on Saul, mentioning the name of the Lord Jesus;
2. How the blindness departed from Saul like scales falling from his eyes, and he saw and was baptized, and became Paul.

HOMILY

-on the God-inspired heart and tongue-

My heart will pour forth good words; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer (Psalm 45:1).

Behold the inspiration of the Spirit of God! The prophet wants to speak of Christ the Lord and his heart swells with power and wisdom. That is why the prophet does not say: "My heart will speak or will pronounce good words, but rather **will pour forth** as though a part of his own heart rushes out like a torrent of water from an overflowing well. A torrent of water is narrow underground, but when it reaches the opening of the spring, it bursts out in a large stream. Such is the heart of the prophet when he wants to speak of Christ. Such is the power of grace confined in the heart of man. If it does not manifest itself in powerful words or if it does not manifest itself in miraculous works, it will shine within man and work wonders. But when it comes out in words, the tongue of the prophet will become as a reed, as a **pen of a ready writer**. For such a man does not struggle to formulate his thoughts, nor does he struggle to clothe his thoughts in the garment of words, but grace itself pours out thoughts and words, already prepared, through his tongue. Where does such a power in man come from? From God the Holy Spirit. Why does such a power exist? The prophet wants to speak to the King about Himself: **I speak of things which I have made touching the King (Psalm 45:1)**. Actions and words here are identical, as it often happens in Holy Scripture. Where the Spirit speaks, He also acts; and where He acts, He also speaks. One speaks most powerfully through action. The prophet takes from Christ the King, and gives to Christ the King. He speaks enthusiastically of love for the Savior of the world; he speaks from a heart burning with the zeal of divine love. From the distance of time, he sees the Incarnate Son of God, and his heart dances with joy like a weary night-traveler when he sees the beautiful dawn in the east!

O Lord God, the Holy Spirit, do not deny us Thy holy and powerful grace, that we may be cleansed from sins and made worthy of the Kingdom of Christ.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT ABERCIUS, EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES

During the reigns of Emperor Antoninus and his son, Marcus Aurelius, St. Abercius was the bishop of the city of Hierapolis in Phrygia. The great majority in this city were pagans, and St. Abercius governed his sparse flock, sorrowing in his heart because of the great number of pagans and idolaters, and diligently praying to God that He would bring them to the light of truth. During a boisterous idolatrous festival, Abercius became inflamed with God's zeal and entered the idolatrous temple, smashing all the idols. When the enraged pagans sought to kill him, three young madmen, foaming at the mouth and howling, fell down before this man of God, and he drove the demons from them. The young men became sane and calm. This turned the pagans' anger into amazement at the wonderworker of Christ, and five hundred of them immediately desired baptism. Little by little, all of Hierapolis came to believe in Christ and were baptized. The proconsul of the province, Publius, had a mother who was blind. Abercius restored her sight by prayer, and Publius, his mother and many others believed in Christ. In old age, Abercius was summoned to Rome, where he healed the emperor's daughter of insanity. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared several times to His faithful follower. People from near and far came to him for miraculous help when they suffered from incurable illnesses. The demons not only feared him, but also served him at his command. At the guidance of the Lord Himself, Abercius preached the Gospel throughout Syria and Mesopotamia. In great old age, St. Abercius presented himself to his beloved Lord in Hierapolis, at the end of the second century.

2. THE VENERABLE LOT

Lot was a great Egyptian ascetic and a contemporary of St. Arsenius the Great and St. Agathon. He lived a life of asceticism in his monastery near a lake at the town of Arsinoe, and directed many brethren on the path to salvation. His close friend and advisor was Abba Joseph. Lot once said to Joseph: "Abba, I fast as much as I can, hold fast to prayer, keep silence and contemplate, and also, through abstinence, guard myself from impure thoughts. Therefore, what else can I do?" The elder stood up, raised his hands to heaven, and his ten fingers shone like ten flaming candles. He then replied: "If you desire, you can be all aflame!" Having pleased God and set many on the path to salvation, St. Lot entered peacefully into rest in the fifth century.

3. COMMEMORATION OF THE MIRACULOUS DELIVERANCE OF MOSCOW FROM THE LITHUANIANS WITH THE HELP OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS

During the reign of Prince Basil Ivanovich, the Lithuanians occupied Moscow and the Russians were in great despair. Then St. Sergius of Radonezh appeared in a vision to the captured Bishop Arsenius, and promised him that Moscow would be cleansed of the Lithuanians the very next day, by the power and prayer of the Holy Most-pure One. Indeed, the Lithuanians fled the city, and the Russian army re-entered Moscow. The entire populace glorified God and the Most-holy Theotokos with tears of joy.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ABERCIUS, EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES

St. Abercius, a model of meekness,
Is a most beautiful example of Christian zeal.
He zealously toppled the dumb idols
And joyfully exposed himself to death.
But God protects the servant who strives for Him,
And shields him from evil with His right hand.
Against the saint, demons and men rose up,
But became shamefully silent before the power of the Cross.
What the saint desired, the Lord granted,
And though he was in much sorrow, he gladdened many.
St. Abercius was as a fiery pillar,
A light and an enlightener of men.
He preached Christ to many peoples-
From powerful emperors to the poor-
And witnessed Christ through many miracles.
He poured miracles out like living water;
By the life-creating word he assuaged the thirsty,
And with the teaching of Christ he fed the hungry.
St. Abercius, a model of meekness,
Gave himself to God in honorable old age,
And was crowned with eternal youth in Paradise,
Surrounded by the joy and glory of heaven.
O wonderful holy one, strive yet a little more:
Protect the remaining flock on earth,
Implore Christ's mercy on us through prayer,
That the Church will boast in you to the end.

REFLECTION

As much as the strictness of holy men toward themselves is a cause for amazement, so also is their compassion toward others. They have disinterest for themselves, and concern for others. St. Hilarion the Great, unable to pay his fare to Sicily, offered the owner of the ship his Gospel (which he, in his youth, had copied with his own hands). When he had cured a certain prince of an unclean spirit, the prince wanted to present him with ten liters of gold. The saint would not accept the gold, but showed him barley bread and said: "Those who feed on this kind of bread look upon gold as mud!" When men begged him to pray to God for rain, or to save them from floods or poisonous snakes, St. Hilarion helped them by his prayer. This is how St. Abercius acted as well. Seeing many people in pain and sickness, he knelt in a certain place and prayed to God that He would open up a spring of warm, healing water there, that the infirm might be healed and glorify God. God then opened a spring of warm water on that spot. When Abercius healed the emperor's daughter of insanity, the emperor offered him gold, silver and other gifts, but St. Abercius said: "Riches are not needed for one who considers bread and water a royal meal." Not seeking anything for himself, Abercius nevertheless begged the emperor to do two favors for his flock in Hierapolis: to build a bath over those healing waters, and to give sufficient wheat each year to the poor of Hierapolis. The emperor agreed and did according to the saint's request.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the miraculous healing of Aeneas of Lydda (**Acts 9**):

1. How Aeneas had lain paralyzed for eight years;
2. How the Apostle Peter healed him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ;
3. How Aeneas arose healthy.

HOMILY

-on the beauty of Christ above all other beauty-

Thou art fairer than the sons of men (Psalm 45:2).

Holy Scripture does not ascribe any particular value to physical beauty, and in general to anything transient. That is why everyone who reads Holy Scripture should take care to be sufficiently attentive and wise to transfer the praise of physical beauty to the soul and to spiritual values. Without a doubt, spiritual beauty gives a wondrous attractiveness to the most unattractive body, just as an ugly soul makes even the most attractive body repulsive. The Prophet David, **pouring forth good words (Psalm 45:1)**, says to his King, the Lord Jesus Christ: **Thou art fairer than the sons of men**. The Lord Himself created His bodily cloak as He wanted. Had He wanted to appear in the world as the physically fairest of men, He could have done so. But there is nothing in the Gospel to indicate that He drew followers to Himself or influenced men by His appearance. He Himself said: **the flesh profiteth nothing (John 6:63)**. Therefore, it is clear that David was not speaking of the physical beauty of Christ, but of His spiritual, divine beauty. This is clearly seen in the following words of the Psalmist: **Grace is poured forth upon thy lips (Psalm 45:2)**. So it is that the unsurpassed beauty of the Son of God is not in the form and shape of His lips, but rather in the stream of grace that flows from His mouth. Again, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of Christ: **He had no form or comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him (Isaiah 53:2-3)**. Do Isaiah and David agree? Perfectly well. David speaks of Christ's inward beauty, and Isaiah speaks of Christ's external abasement. Isaiah said that He would not be seen as a king or a rich man, but as a servant and sufferer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou art fairer to us than all men and angels: glory to Thine immortal and unending beauty. O gracious Lord, correct the ugliness of our souls, which are disfigured by sin, we pray Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE JAMES, BROTHER OF THE LORD

James is called the Lord's brother because he was the son of the righteous Joseph, the betrothed of the Most-holy Theotokos. When the righteous Joseph was near death, he divided his estate among his sons, and wanted to leave a portion to the Lord Jesus, the son of the Most-holy Virgin, but all the other brothers opposed this, not regarding Jesus as their brother. James greatly loved Jesus and declared that he would include Jesus in his share. That is why he is called the Lord's brother. From the beginning, James was devoted to the Lord Jesus. According to tradition, he traveled to Egypt with the Most-holy Virgin and Joseph, when Herod sought to slay the newborn King. Later, as soon as he heard Christ's teaching, James lived by it. It is said of him that he never ate fat or oil, but lived on just bread and water, and was a virgin to the end of his life on earth. He often kept vigil at night and prayed to God. The Lord numbered him among His Seventy Apostles. Following His glorious Resurrection, the Lord appeared to him especially, as the Apostle Paul testifies (**I Corinthians 15:7**). He was Bishop of Jerusalem for thirty years and zealously governed the Church of God. At the instruction of the Lord, James compiled the first Liturgy, which seemed very long for later Christians, and St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom shortened it. He converted many Jews and Greeks to the Christian Faith, and even the unbelieving Jews were amazed at his righteousness, referring to him as "James the Just." When Ananias became High Priest, he and other Jewish elders determined to kill James for being a preacher of Christ. Once, during the feast of Passover, when many people had gathered in Jerusalem, the elders forced James to climb onto the roof of the Temple, and tried to make him speak against Christ. He climbed up and spoke to the people of Christ as the Son of God and the true Messiah, of His Resurrection and His eternal glory in the heavens. The infuriated priests and elders pushed him off the roof; he fell and was severely injured, but was still alive. Then, one man ran up and struck him on the head with a fuller's club with such force that his brains spilled out. Thus, this most glorious apostle of Christ died a martyr's death, and went to live eternally in the Kingdom of his Lord. James was sixty-six years old when he suffered for Christ.

2. SAINT IGNATIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Ignatius was the son of Emperor Michael Rangabe. He became patriarch after St. Methodius in 846. Then Ignatius was deposed in 858 and exiled. Photius, the chief secretary to the emperor, was made patriarch in his place. However, when Emperor Basil the Macedonian ascended the throne, he re-instated Ignatius to the patriarchal throne. St. Ignatius governed the Church with great zeal and wisdom. He built the Monastery of the Holy Archangels in which he reposed in the Lord in the eighty-ninth year of his life.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR JAMES OF BOROVICHI

All that is known of this saint is what he revealed in a vision to people from the town of Borovichy after his repose. One day in 1540, his body floated down the river Meta, and washed ashore near Borovichy. Many miracles took place from his relics.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE JAMES, BROTHER OF THE LORD

James, the Brother of the Lord, a most beautiful righteous one,
Explained the teaching of Christ with his life,
And when they tortured him, he meekly knelt,
And prayed to God for his enemies.
In a most difficult place, at a most difficult time,
He patiently bore the episcopal yoke.
He governed the Church as a good shepherd,
And glorified the Lord in word and deed.
He taught men to love Jesus,
And taught the faithful to pray to God.
"Vainglorious man, what is faith alone?
Faith without works is as empty straw.
Whoever has hearing, let him hear the teaching:
Faith without works is a body without spirit.
Whence come wars, abhorrent to all?
From the impure passions of your body.
Men always war and have no peace,
For their hearts desire evil, then shed blood.
Whoever turns a sinner away from error
Will receive the Lord's gift of eternal life in reward."
The Jews slew the righteous James-
But they have murdered themselves, and glorified him!
O wonderful James, holy apostle,
Help the faithful who pray to you.

REFLECTION

From God comes grace, but from us comes labor. Therefore, let no one even think that the holy apostles relied solely on the God-given grace, or that it was easy for them, or that they performed their great work in the world without effort. Does not the Apostle Paul say: **But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (I Corinthians 9:27)?** And still, in another place, does he not say that he spent his life **in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (II Corinthians 11:26-27)?** St. James fed only on bread and that not to satisfaction. He slept very little, and spent his nights in prayer. He knelt so much in prayer that the skin on his knees became as hard as the skin on the knees of a camel. This brother of the Lord prayed with tears and sighs not only for the Church, which he governed, but also for the whole world. Even when he was pushed from the temple roof by the malicious Jews, and thus was completely broken, the holy apostle never forgot his debt to God and to men. Gathering his last strength, he raised himself to his knees, stretched forth his hands toward heaven and fervently prayed to God saying: "Lord, forgive them this sin, for they know not what they are doing." While he was praying thus, wicked men struck him with stones from all sides. Seeing this, one of the sons of Rechab cried out: "Stop! What are you doing? The righteous one is praying to God for you, and you are killing him!" However, that shout of a compassionate soul could not deter the murderers, accustomed to evil-doing, from killing the saint of God. So it was that the apostles did not rely on grace alone, but also put forth nearly superhuman effort to show themselves worthy of God's grace.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the miraculous resurrection of Tabitha (**Acts 9**):

1. How Tabitha lay dead on her bed;
2. How the Apostle Peter prayed to God for her and said: Tabitha, arise;
3. How Tabitha regained life, and arose.

HOMILY

-on the beauty of the king's daughter-

The king's daughter is all glorious within (Psalm 45:13).

The Church of God is the daughter of the King. However poor and unattractive to the physical eye it may seem on the outside, no matter how persecuted and humiliated, it is filled with royal radiance and beauty from within. The King, He Who is **fairer than the sons of men (Psalm 45:2)**, imparts beauty to His royal daughter. The Church of God is like a vesture for Christ; Christ lives in her. No outer beauty can be compared with inner beauty, that is, the beauty of Christ.

The Most-holy Theotokos is the daughter of the King: **Her vesture is woven with gold (Psalm 45:13)**. This vesture is the virtue of her soul. That we understand "vesture" as virtue is clear in the parable of the marriage of the king's son. The man who was not clothed in a **wedding garment** was driven from the king's table and punished (**cf. Matthew 22:11-13**). True faith in God was the golden vesture of the Most-holy Virgin. Virginity, meekness, compassion, sanctity, piety, devotion to God's will, and all other virtues, were like embroideries on this golden garment. However, her beauty was the work of the Lord Christ, hidden within her and born of her.

The soul of every faithful Christian is like the daughter of the King. All the beauty of that soul is in Christ and of Christ, Who is within the soul. A soul without Christ the Sun of Righteousness is in darkness, without form and comeliness, as the universe would be without form and comeliness without the material sun.

O great and gracious Lord, our true God and our man-loving Provider, help us to clothe ourselves in the garment of the virtues, that we may not be found naked at Thy Dread Judgment.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR ARETHAS

This holy martyr suffered for the Christian Faith with over four thousand Christians-priests, monks and nuns, men, women and children. Arethas was the eparch in the town of Nagra, in the southern Arabian land of Omir. He was ninety-five years old when he suffered. Dunaan, a cruel Jewish persecutor of Christians, then governed Omir. Determined to eradicate all Christians from his land, he surrounded the Christian town of Nagra, and sent a message to the people saying he would put them all to death unless they renounced Christ. The citizens closed the gates, and Dunaan attacked the city wall for a long time without success. Then the iniquitous governor swore to the citizens that he would do nothing to them, if only they would open the gate for him to enter and receive the tribute that they owed him-and that he would take it and immediately withdraw. The Christians believed him and opened the gate. Then the oath-breaking Jew summoned the aged Arethas, the clergy and other distinguished citizens and beheaded them all with the sword. He then perpetrated a horrible slaughter in the town. Learning of this, the Byzantine Emperor Justin was greatly grieved, and wrote a letter to the Ethiopian Emperor, Elesbaan, requesting him to set out with an army against Dunaan to avenge the innocent blood of the Christians. Elesbaan obeyed Justin, attacked the governor of Omir with his army, defeated him, slew his entire army, and beheaded him. By a revelation from God, a certain devout man named Abramius was installed as governor of Omir, and again by God's revelation, St. Gregory of Omir (December 19) was installed as archbishop. Christians rebuilt the Church of the Holy Trinity in Nagra that Dunaan had burned, and also built a church to the Holy Martyr Arethas and the other martyrs of Nagra. St. Arethas and the others suffered and received martyr's wreaths from the Lord in the year 523.

2. SAINT ELESBAAN, KING OF ETHIOPIA

Inflamed with zeal for the Christian Faith, this pious king raised an army against the governor Dunaan, the wicked persecutor of Christians in the land of Omir. However, at the battle's outset, Elesbaan had little success and much of his army perished in the arid desert. He then wept bitterly before God, and vowed to become a monk if God would help him conquer the mortal enemy of Christianity. Defeating Dunaan, Elesbaan returned to Ethiopia, immediately left the imperial court and entered a monastery, where he lived a strict life of asceticism as a true monk for fifteen full years. God endowed him with the grace of miracle-working before and after his death. He entered into rest in the year 555.

3. THE ICON OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS, "JOY OF ALL WHO SORROW"

This name is given to one of the wonderworking icons of the Most-holy Theotokos. On this day the icon is celebrated for the miraculous healing in Moscow, of Euphemia, the sister of Patriarch Joachim, in the year 1688. Euphemia had a serious wound in the side and as the doctors failed in their treatments, she prayed with tears to the Most-holy Theotokos. Then, she heard a voice: "Euphemia, go to the Church of the Transfiguration of my Son; there you will find the icon, 'Joy of All Who Sorrow.' Have the priest pray for you before this icon and you will be healed." Euphemia did so, and was immediately made well.

4. THE VENERABLE ARETHAS OF THE MONASTERY OF THE KIEV CAVES

He reposed in the year 1190. (See "Reflection" below.)

HYMN OF PRAISE

TO THE ICON OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS, "JOY OF ALL WHO SORROW"

O Most-holy Mother of God, "Joy of All Who Sorrow,"
Grant thy mercy to us sinners.
Thy Son now sits on the throne of the Eternal Kingdom,
And all our troubles thou seest; thou knowest them as they occur.
Thou hast always prayed to Christ God for the faithful,
And hast relieved much pain and misery of the sorrowful.
O Holy Virgin, never cease, to the end of time,
To pray for the salvation of our race.
God hast made thee even more glorious than the Seraphim:
O hasten to us, O Joy of all who sorrow!

REFLECTION

When a consecrated person commits a transgression, a greater punishment awaits him than awaits a layman, less enlightened in the mystery of the will of God than he, who commits the same sin. St. Arethas was a monk in the Monastery of the Kiev Caves, and was very avaricious. He would give nothing to anyone of the piles of possessions in his cell, not even a kopeck. But once, he became very seriously ill and saw, as if in a vision, devils snatching his soul from the angels, screaming, "He is ours, he is ours!" and citing as their proof Arethas's greed and miserliness. Upon his recovery Arethas amended his life, and from then on counted all earthly goods as nothing. Our benevolent God forgave him, and later endowed him with abundant grace. Again, in the monastery where the blessed Emperor Elesbaan reposed, a monk developed the habit of visiting a tavern often, getting drunk there, and even committing immoral acts with women. One day, returning from the tavern, a terrifyingly huge snake began chasing him and gained on him rapidly. In great torment and anguish, the monk cried out: "Depart from me, as you would from the holy and righteous Elesbaan!" Suddenly, the snake stopped. And the monk heard as it were a human voice from the serpent: "An angel of God commanded me to consume you because of your impurity and foulness, for you vowed to serve God in purity, but now you soil your body and anger the Holy Spirit." The monk vowed never to sin again, returned to the monastery, and sinned no more up to his death. Thus, God rebuked, and showed mercy, by the prayers of the Holy Emperor Elesbaan.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Cornelius the Centurion's wondrous visitation by the angel of God (**Acts 10**):

1. How, though it was daytime, Cornelius saw in a vision an angel of God who called him by name;
2. How Cornelius was afraid and replied, What is it, Lord?
3. How the angel instructed him to send to Joppa for the Apostle Peter, who would speak to him the words of salvation.

HOMILY

-on the clear coming of God-

Our God shall come and shall not keep silent (Psalm 50:3).

The vocation of a commander is different than the vocation of a judge. The commander does not show himself to his enemy immediately, but allows his enemy to think whatever he wants about him; for the main purpose of the commander is to conquer. The judge, however, immediately shows himself to those whom he has to judge.

Then, too, the vocation of a teacher is different than the vocation of a judge. For the teacher, the main purpose is to teach his pupils. That is why he often lowers himself to the level of his students and speaks to them as their friend. A judge, however, from beginning to end, is bound to show himself as nothing other than a judge.

The vocation of a physician is different than the vocation of a judge, and the difference in these two vocations can be compared as in the first two instances cited above.

Brethren, God appeared to the world in the body of a man. He appeared as a Commander, as a Teacher and as a Physician, but He has not yet appeared as a Judge. In the first instance, He chose to remain silent, and not to openly express His greatest dignity, but rather left His enemies, His pupils and His patients to make their judgments about Him from what they knew. Those who had sound judgment would know Him as God in the flesh by the evidence of His words and by His deeds, by His love for mankind and by the heavenly signs at His birth, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. However, those whose minds were darkened by evil passion would not recognize Him or acknowledge Him as God. But when He comes as Judge, then no one will ask "Art Thou He?" or "Who art Thou?" because everyone will know, without any doubt, Who He is. The angels will blow their trumpets before Him; His Cross will shine in the heavens before Him: A fire goes before Him and burns up His enemies round about (**Psalm 97:3**). Then both the believers and the unbelievers, the righteous and the unrighteous, will recognize the Judge. Then, only they who recognized Him beforehand as God, in the cave and on the Cross, will rejoice. Truly, they will rejoice: for they shall recognize in the Judge Him for Whom they waged war, Him from Whom they learned, and Him by Whom they were healed.

O Most-glorious Savior, have mercy on us and set us aright before Thy Second Coming.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS MARCIAN AND MARTYRIUS

These saints of God were clergymen under Paul, the Patriarch of Constantinople, during the reign of Emperor Constantius. With the death of the great Emperor Constantine, the Arian heresy, which until then had been suppressed, revived and gained momentum. Even Emperor Constantius himself leaned toward this heresy. There were two influential noblemen at the emperor's court, Eusebius and Philip, both of whom were ardent Arians. Under their influence, Patriarch Paul was ousted from the patriarchal throne and banished to Armenia, where the Arians strangled him. Then the dishonorable Macedonius seized the patriarchal throne. At that time Orthodoxy had two bitter struggles: against the pagans and against the heretics. Marcian and Martyrius interceded with all their strength and determination on the side of Orthodoxy. Marcian was a reader and Martyrius was a subdeacon at the cathedral church of Hagia Sophia; under Patriarch Paul they had been patriarchal notaries (secretaries). The Arians at first tried to bribe them, but when these holy men rejected this with scorn, the heretics condemned them to death. When they were brought to the executioner, they raised their hands and prayed to God, giving Him thanks for a martyr's end to their lives: "Lord, we rejoice that we depart from this life by such a death. Make us worthy to be partakers of eternal life. Thou art our life!" They placed their necks beneath the sword and were beheaded in the year 355. Later, St. John Chrysostom built a church in their name over their miracle-working relics.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ANASTASIUS

He was a cloth-maker and a zealous Christian. During Diocletian's persecution of Christians, this man of God appeared before the judge in the Dalmatian town of Solin, and confessed his faith in Christ. He was inhumanly tortured and slain, and his body was thrown into the sea but was later found and honorably buried.

3. SAINT TABITHA

St. Tabitha (which means "gazelle") was a disciple of the apostles and lived in Joppa. She was **full of good works and almsdeeds (Acts 9:36)**, but suddenly became weak and died. The Apostle Peter was then in the town of Lydda, and the grieving disciples sent for him, imploring him to comfort her kinsmen. Upon his arrival, the great Apostle of Christ told everyone to leave the room where the corpse lay, then knelt in prayer. **Then, turning to the body, he said: Tabitha, arise (Acts 9:40)** and Tabitha opened her eyes and stood up. Many believed in the Lord Jesus Christ because of this wonderful miracle.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT TABITHA

Tabitha died, not that she might no longer live,
But that the world might be astonished at the miracle which came to pass.
Beside her deathbed Peter humbly knelt,
And uttered fervent prayer unto the Lord.
She was resurrected in body! And the unbelievers heard
How the Lord hearkened to the apostle's prayer
And returned the living soul to the dead body.
And Peter turned the unbelievers to the Faith.
O wondrous miracle, of a kind unknown in the world!
By the name of Christ, death was conquered.
Death was conquered, and life rejoices.
The young Tabitha rejoices in life;
And, more than in her own life,
She rejoices that she served as a wonder to the unbelieving world.
She was resurrected in body! The unbelievers heard,
And their own souls were raised from the dead.
O great Peter, servant of Christ,
Pray to our Savior for us;
Resurrect our souls, buried in the mud-
You, who revived Tabitha by the power of God.

REFLECTION

Among other mysterious perceptions from the world of spirits, the saints also had perceptions of sweet fragrances from good spirits and foul stench from impure spirits. During every appearance of luminous, pure spirits, a life-giving and sweet fragrance wafted about; and during every appearance of dark and impure spirits, a suffocating, unbearable stench filled the air. The saints were able to discern which passion possessed a man by the kind of stench he emanated. Thus it was that St. Euthymius the Great recognized the stench of the passion of adultery in the monk Emilian of the Lavra of St. Theoctistus. Going to Matins one morning, Euthymius passed by Emilian's cell and smelled the stench of the demon of adultery. Emilian had not committed any physical sin, but had adulterous thoughts that were being forced into his heart by the demon, and the saint already sensed it by its smell. The power of this perception once revealed itself even more wondrously in St. Hilarion the Great. A certain avaricious miser had sent some of his vegetables to Hilarion. When they were brought to Hilarion for a meal, the saint said: "Take these away from here. I cannot stand the stench that comes from these vegetables! Do you not smell how they reek of avarice?" When the brethren were amazed by these words, Hilarion told them to take the vegetables to the oxen, and they would see that not even the oxen would eat them. Indeed, the oxen merely sniffed at them, and turned their heads away in disgust.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's miraculous revelation to the Apostle Peter (**Acts 11**):

1. How Peter saw the heavens open and a sheet full of all kinds of animals, beasts, creeping things and birds, being lowered to him;
2. How he heard a voice: **Arise, Peter; slay and eat! (Acts 11:7)**;
3. How this admonished him to attend even to the pagans and preach the Gospel to them.

HOMILY

-on fleeing the world and dwelling in the wilderness-

Lo, then would I flee afar off, and remain in the wilderness (Psalm 55:7).

Brethren, from whom did the prophet flee into the wilderness? From evil adversaries, from passions, and from vanity. Why did he flee into the wilderness? Because that is the way of victory over wicked adversaries, passions, and the vanity of the world. Very few choose the wilderness: that is why he fled into the wilderness. Men fight over cities and lands, over authority and wealth, but not over the wilderness. In the cities, the inner adversaries of man-the passions and diverse vanities-constantly are aroused with new fire, while in the wilderness they fade and vanish. Before he spoke of fleeing, the prophet said, **And the terrors of death have fallen upon me (Psalm 55:4)**; this is the reason to flee into the wilderness. One should prepare his soul for the other world, for the encounter with God. Not even a king can save himself from death or avoid judgment. Living in constant luxury and merriment, man is indeed as if lulled to sleep by the strong drink of this world. But then, in the midst of luxury and merriment, the thought of death tugs at him and awakens him. Oh, I must die! I must leave this world! I must come before God and before the angels! Where is my soul? Where are my deeds? With what shall I leave this world, and with what shall I enter into the next world? Thousands upon thousands of those who have been awakened from sinful sleep by such questions have fled to the wilderness and, day and night, they amend their souls and purify their hearts by repentance, prayer, fasting, vigils, labor and other proven means by which man kills the fear of death, and becomes adopted by God.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our Most-wise and Most-gracious Teacher, Who Thyself at times withdrew from men into solitude, help us to be collected in soul and prepare ourselves for Thy Most-glorious Kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR DEMETRIUS

This glorious and wonderworking saint was born in Thessalonica of noble and devout parents. Implored of God by childless parents, Demetrius was their only son, and so was raised and educated with great care. Demetrius's father was a commander in Thessalonica. When his father died, Emperor Maximian appointed Demetrius as commander in his place. As he appointed him, Maximian, an opponent of Christ, particularly recommended that he persecute and exterminate the Christians in Thessalonica. Demetrius not only disobeyed the emperor but openly confessed and preached the Lord Jesus Christ in the city of Thessalonica. When the emperor heard of this he became furious with Demetrius. Then, when he was returning from battle against the Sarmatians, Maximian stopped at Thessalonica to investigate the matter. The emperor summoned Demetrius and questioned him about his faith. Demetrius openly acknowledged his Christian Faith to the emperor and also denounced the emperor's idolatry. Maximian cast Demetrius into prison. Knowing what was awaiting him, Demetrius gave all his goods to his faithful servant Lupus to distribute to the poor, and joyfully awaited his imminent suffering for Christ the Lord. An angel of God appeared to him in prison, saying: "Peace be to you, O sufferer of Christ; be brave and be strong!" After several days, the emperor sent soldiers to the prison to kill Demetrius. The soldiers found the saint of God at prayer and ran him through with lances. Christians secretly took his body and honorably buried it. Healing myrrh flowed from the body of the martyr of Christ, curing many of the sick. Soon, a small church was built over his relics.

An Illyrian nobleman, Leontius, was afflicted with an incurable illness. He hastened, with prayer, to the relics of St. Demetrius and was completely healed. In thanksgiving, Leontius erected a much larger church on the site of the old church. The saint appeared to him on two occasions. When Emperor Justinian wanted to translate the relics of the saint from Thessalonica to Constantinople, flaming sparks sprang from the tomb and a voice was heard: "Stop, and do not touch!" And thus, the relics of St. Demetrius have remained for all time in Thessalonica. As the protector of Thessalonica, St. Demetrius has appeared many times, and on many occasions has saved Thessalonica from great calamity. His miracles are without number. The Russians considered St. Demetrius to be the protector of Siberia, which was conquered and annexed to Russia on October 26, 1581.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYR IOASAPH

Ioasaph was a disciple of St. Niphon, Patriarch of Constantinople, and labored in asceticism on the Holy Mountain. He had so great a love for Christ that all of his ascetic works seemed inadequate, and from love he desired to suffer for his Lord. For that reason he went to Constantinople, where he openly confessed to the Turks his faith in the Holy Trinity and the Son of God. The enraged Turks beheaded him on October 26, 1536.

3. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE GREAT EARTHQUAKE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

In the year 740, during the reign of Emperor Leo the Isaurian, there was a terrifying and prolonged earthquake in Constantinople. The people considered this a punishment from God for their sins, and prayed with great repentance to the Most-holy Theotokos and St. Demetrius, until God showed mercy and the earthquake ceased.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR DEMETRIUS

Thessalonica glorifies its wonderful saint-
St. Demetrius, servant of the Most-high God.
Demetrius, the commander,
Servant of the Creator and Lord.

St. Paul bedewed Thessalonica with tears,
Demetrius watered it with his blood.
Demetrius, the commander,
Servant of the Creator and Lord.

The tears of the apostle and the blood of the martyr
Are the glory, salvation and pride of Thessalonica.
Demetrius, the commander,
Servant of the Creator and Lord.

Let us also glorify Christ's soldier,
The myrrh-gushing saint and courageous martyr.
Demetrius, the commander,
Servant of the Creator and Lord.

REFLECTION

A miracle of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica: Demetrius was a commander of Thessalonica during his life and remained so after his repose. People have felt his presence in Thessalonica, especially in times of great calamities. He protects the city, wards off misfortunes, repels invaders, and helps all who invoke his name. Here is a wonderful example of his unusual aid to people in need. Once, the barbarians attacked Thessalonica and were unable to overtake it. Infuriated at this, they pillaged the countryside and bound and carried off two beautiful maidens whom they gave as a gift to their prince. These maidens knew how to embroider well. When the prince saw their handiwork, he said to them: "I hear that there is a great god in your land, Demetrius, and that he works great miracles. Embroider his face on this linen." The maidens told him that St. Demetrius was not a god but rather God's servant and the helper of Christians. At first, they refused to embroider the face of the saint, but when the prince threatened them with death, they carried out the command and completed the task by St. Demetrius's Day. On the eve of the feast, they looked at their embroidery and wept sorrowfully, as they had to spend the feast day in slavery and had to give that embroidered image of their beloved saint to an impious barbarian. Both maidens prayed to St. Demetrius to forgive them. Then St. Demetrius appeared to them and took them both away, as an angel had once taken the Prophet Habakkuk. He brought them to Thessalonica and set them in his church. A solemn all-night vigil was being celebrated, and many people were there. When they learned of the miraculous rescue of these Christian maidens, all glorified God and St. Demetrius, His great servant and commander.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the miraculous deliverance of Peter from prison (**Acts 12**):

1. How Peter was sleeping in the prison bound with two chains;
2. How the faithful prayed to God for Peter;
3. How a radiant angel appeared in the prison, freed the shackled Peter, and led him out.

HOMILY

-on the heart ready for God-

My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready (Psalm 57:7).

Brethren, blessed is he who is able to speak like this to his Lord! Blessed is he whose heart is completely ready to follow the will of God. The readiness of the heart of man lies in this: to joyfully follow the will of God and not be confused by one's own thoughts and desires. At first, the repentant King David had followed his own sinful thoughts and desires, and was like a boat on a stormy sea. However, when he realized that the storm was going to drown him, he turned to God with great repentance and tears, and turned the boat of his life entirely over to God. **My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready!** he cried out with great peace of soul, for he knew that he had given his boat into the hands of the Most-skilled Helmsman. The storm still raged and the winds and waves still assaulted him, but he was not afraid, convinced that nothing could smash his boat, and that his boat would sail safely to a calm harbor. A "ready heart" means a heart cleansed of pride and humbled before the majestic power and wisdom of God. A "ready heart" means a heart emptied of all worldly desires and illusions, and filled with nothing but aspirations toward God and love for God. A "ready heart" means a heart that is healed of all restlessness, cares and fears, and is quieted and encouraged by the presence of God's grace. **I will sing and give praise in my glory (Psalm 57:7)**, continues the Psalmist. This shows that his heart is truly ready—he is not proud of his royal glory but ascribes it to God. He humbled himself before God as nothing, and now his sole pleasure is to magnify and glorify God. His personal glory only gives him a reason for glorifying His All-glorious God.

O my brethren, let us endeavor that our hearts be ready soon before God: ready to hear the word of God, ready to follow the will of God, ready to glorify the Living God.

O Lord God, our immortal Creator, help us to ready our hearts, that they may be vessels of Thy life-giving grace.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR NESTOR

In the time of the suffering of St. Demetrius the Myrrh-gusher, there was a young man of Thessalonica, Nestor, who learned the Christian Faith from St. Demetrius himself. At that time Christ's enemy, Emperor Maximian, organized various games and amusements for the people. The emperor's favorite in these games was a Vandal by the name of Lyaeus, a man of Goliath-like size and strength. As the emperor's gladiator, Lyaeus challenged men every day to single combat and slew them. Thus, the bloodthirsty Lyaeus amused the bloodthirsty, idolatrous Maximian. The emperor built a special stage for Lyaeus's battles, similar to a threshing floor on pillars. Spears, points upward, were planted beneath this platform. When Lyaeus defeated someone in wrestling, he would throw him from the platform onto the forest of spears. The emperor and his pagan subjects cheered as some poor wretch writhed in torment on the spears until he died. Among Lyaeus's innocent victims were many Christians: when no one volunteered to duel with Lyaeus, by the emperor's orders Christians were arrested and forced to duel with him. Seeing this horrifying amusement of the pagan world, Nestor's heart was torn with pain, and he decided to come forward for a duel with the gigantic Lyaeus. But first, he went to prison to see St. Demetrius and sought a blessing from him to do this. St. Demetrius blessed him, signed him with the sign of the Cross on the forehead and on the chest and prophesied to him: "You will defeat Lyaeus, but you will suffer for Christ." Thus, young Nestor went to duel with Lyaeus. Maximian was present with a multitude of people; everyone felt pity for the young Nestor, who would surely die, and tried to dissuade him from dueling with Lyaeus. Nestor crossed himself and said: "O God of Demetrius, help me!" and with God's help, he overcame Lyaeus, knocked him down, and threw him onto the sharp spears, where the heavy giant soon found death. Then all the people cried out: "Great is the God of Demetrius!" But the emperor, shamed before the people and sorrowing for his favorite Lyaeus, was greatly angered at Nestor and Demetrius, and commanded that Nestor be beheaded and Demetrius run through with lances. Thus, the Christian hero Nestor ended his earthly life and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of his Lord in the year 306.

2. THE VENERABLE NESTOR THE CHRONICLER

At the age of seventeen, Nestor entered the Monastery of the Kiev Caves while St. Theodosius was still abbot. He wrote the first history of the Russian people, in which he intertwined the history of Russian asceticism. He was distinguished by unusual humility and meekness. In his literary work, he often referred to himself as unworthy, coarse, ignorant and full of every kind of sin. But God, Who knows the hearts of men, glorified this wonderful saint of His. When Nestor entered into rest on October 27, 1114, his relics performed many miracles.

3. SAINT ANDREW, PRINCE OF SMOLENSK

Out of love for Christ, Andrew abandoned the glory and honor of the world, hid himself in a monastery and there, disguised and unknown, served as a sacristan for thirty years. He peacefully entered into rest in the Lord in 1390; his miracle-working relics were found in 1540.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR NESTOR

St. Nestor was outraged at evil
And was zealous for the Christian Faith.
The young disciple of St. Demetrius
Seemed young and weak against the terrible Lyaeus,
But he traced the sign of the Cross on himself
And impaled the powerful Lyaeus on a spear.
He had been given power from above,
Like David against Goliath.
"You will conquer, but you will be tortured,
And will lay down your life for Christ."
Thus Demetrius prophesied to him,
And as he said, so it came to pass.
Nestor jubilantly went to torture,
And wonderfully magnified the wondrous Christ
With sweet words and sweet hymns,
And fervent prayers for the Church.
Great in spirit, small in years,
He did not grieve over his young life;
His blood strengthened the Church,
And Nestor was eternally glorified.

REFLECTION

A miracle of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica: That the saints of God live, clothed in great glory and might in the heavens, Orthodox Christians know, not by their own reasoning, but by the true help and visitations of the saints. At times the saints appear so that men may see and hear them; at times, only to be either seen or heard; at times, though unseen and unheard, they influence our thoughts, our dispositions and our actions. Among the many miracles of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica the following is recorded: A young man named Onesiphorus was appointed to the service of sacristan in the Church of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica. His primary task was to keep an account of the candles and lampadas. This young man began to steal candles, take them home, and then resell them. St. Demetrius appeared to him and said: "Brother Onesiphorus, your action is not pleasing to me, for you are stealing candles. By this, you bring harm to others and especially to yourself. Cease doing this and repent!" Onesiphorus was frightened and ashamed and, for a time, stopped stealing candles. But he eventually forgot himself, and again began to steal candles. One morning, a distinguished man brought some large candles to the tomb of the saint, lit them, prayed and left. Onesiphorus approached the candles and stretched forth his hand with the intention of taking them, but at that moment a voice like thunder roared: "Are you doing that again?!" As though struck by lightning, Onesiphorus fell to the ground, unconscious. When someone came into the church he found him and lifted him up off the floor; he gradually came to himself and related all that had happened. Everyone was astonished, and glorified God.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Peter's wondrous journey with the angel of God (**Acts 12**):

1. How the angel led Peter out of prison and brought him to the city;
2. How they invisibly passed by the first and second guards;
3. How the locked gates of the city opened to them of their own accord.

HOMILY

-on zeal for the house of God-

For the zeal of Thy house has eaten me up and the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me (Psalm 69:9).

The heavens are the house of God. The Church of God is the house of God. The bodies of believing people are the house of God. Wherever God is, there is the house of God; and where the house of God is, there is holiness. Men dishonor the holiness of God's house, and the royal prophet is provoked and burns with zeal. He takes upon himself all the offenses against the holy things of God, and they fall upon him like a fire that enkindles him with even more zeal. Men desecrate the heavens when they do not believe that which God Himself revealed to mankind for the sake of their salvation. When men oppose or pervert the truth, as do the heretics, or when, of their own free will, they conceive of Christ according to their corporeal understanding, or when they have doubts about angels and saints, the Judgment, and the Eternal Kingdom of Christ, and refuse to consider the eternal punishment of unrepentant sinners-in all this and more, men attack the house of God and desecrate its holiness like savage animals. This causes zeal against the opponents and the blasphemers of God to rise in the hearts of the righteous. In the same manner, men attack the house of God's holiness when they behave unworthily toward the Church of God, when they are negligent concerning the Church's ordinances, when they are slothful toward ecclesiastical commandments and malicious toward the servants of the Church. Again, zeal for the holiness of the house of God is inflamed in the hearts of the righteous and the devout. Finally, the corrupting of the human body, the surrendering to passions, the service of sin, abduction, murder, brutality, drunkenness and other wicked actions, are all attacks on the holiness of God's house. It is all blasphemy against God and against man. Again, the fervor of the zealots of holiness rises up and shines as a heavenly flame before men. O my brethren, let us look at Christ's zeal for the holiness of God's house, and the zeal of the apostles and the Holy Fathers of our Orthodox Church. Let us have more zeal for our salvation than the devil has, day and night, for our destruction.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Model of our zeal for holiness, grant us a spark of Thy zeal that we may be like Thee in zeal, and be saved by Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR PARASCEVA

She was born in the city of Iconium of wealthy and Christ-loving parents. After the death of her parents, the maiden Parasceva began to distribute her possessions to the poor and the less fortunate, all in the name of Christ the Lord. When a persecution began under Diocletian, Parasceva was brought to trial before the governor of that land. When the governor asked her for her name, she replied that she was called a Christian. The governor rebuked her because she did not give her usual name and Parasceva said to him: ``First, I had to tell you my name in eternal life, and then my name in this temporal life." After flogging her, the governor cast Parasceva into prison where an angel of God appeared to her, healed her of her wounds, and comforted her. By prayer, Parasceva destroyed all the idols in the pagan temple. After prolonged and harsh tortures, Parasceva was beheaded with the sword and took up her abode in eternal life.

2. SAINT ARSENIJE, ARCHBISHOP OF PECH

Arsenije was a great hierarch of the Serbian Church and the successor of St. Sava. Arsenije was born in Srem. While still in his youth, he was tonsured a monk and devoted himself sincerely and whole-heartedly to asceticism for the salvation of his soul. Hearing of the wonderful person and work of St. Sava, Arsenije went to him in Zhicha, where St. Sava received him cordially and included him among the brotherhood of Zhicha. Seeing the rare virtues in Arsenije, Sava soon appointed him abbot of the Zhicha monastery. When the Hungarians attacked the Serbian lands, Sava sent Arsenije to the south to look for a place more secluded than Zhicha for the archiepiscopal see. Arsenije chose Pech, and built a monastery there and a church dedicated to the Holy Apostles (which was later renamed the Church of the Ascension of the Lord). Before his second departure for Jerusalem, Sava designated Arsenije as his successor to the archiepiscopal throne, and when Sava reposed in Trnovo on his way back from Jerusalem, Arsenije urged King Vladislav to translate the body of St. Sava to the Serbian land. He governed the Church prudently for thirty years and reposed in the Lord on October 28, 1266. On the wall of the altar in the church of Pech is written: ``O Lord our God, hearken: visit and bless this church ... and remember also me, the sinful Arsenije." Arsenije is buried in the church at Pech.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR TERENCE

He was from Syria and suffered for the Christian Faith with his wife Neonilla and their seven children. After many tortures, during which the power of God was manifested, they were all beheaded with the sword.

4. SAINT STEPHEN OF ST. SAVA'S

He was the composer of many beautiful canons. He lived the ascetic life in the community of St. Sava the Sanctified. He was later ordained a bishop and peacefully entered into rest in the year 807.

5. SAINT ATHANASIUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

He was an opponent of union with Rome, in contrast to his predecessor John Beccus (1275-1282). He was an ascetic and a prayerful person from his childhood. Beloved by his people, Athanasius provoked the displeasure of certain priests by his moral strictness. He withdrew to his monastery on Mount Ganos, where he labored even more austere than before. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared to him and scolded him gently for leaving his flock to the wolves. When he foretold the day of the earthquake in Constantinople, Emperor Andronicus reinstated him to the patriarchal throne against his will. After that, he again secretly withdrew to the ascetic life. He entered into rest at the age of one hundred. He was clairvoyant and a miracle-worker.

6. SAINT DIMITRI, BISHOP OF ROSTOV

Dimitri was a great hierarch, preacher, author and ascetic. He was born near Kiev in the year 1651, and reposed in the year 1709. Among his many glorious works of instruction, he was known especially for his translation and publication of **The Lives of the Saints**. He foresaw his own death three days in advance, and died while at prayer. Dimitri was a great light of the Russian Church and of Orthodoxy in general. He had heavenly visions during his life. He served the Lord zealously and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Heaven.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ARSENIJE, ARCHBISHOP OF PECH

The wise hierarch St. Arsenije
Does not hide his wondrous power, even today.
He hastens to God with gentle prayers,
And helps the faithful servants of Christ;
He has close access to God Most-high,
For he was made worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven.
When cruel Shishman, ruler of the Bulgarians,
Sought to plunder the Monastery of Pech,
His soldiers encamped near there,
But that black night he had no peace.
From the heavens, a fiery pillar appeared,
And Shishman's army was overcome by fear,
And fled, without a backward glance,
From the shrine of Pech, where the saint reposes.
God gave a wreath of power and glory
To the wonderful successor of St. Sava.
He continued the work of his glorious predecessor,
And thus, with St. Sava, became the pride of his people.
To St. Arsenije we now pray
That his grace might shine forth upon us.

REFLECTION

St. Dimitri of Rostov was a saint in the ancient and true model of the early Fathers. Not only did he write beautiful and instructive books, but also shone forth as an example to his flock. He was a great ascetic and man of prayer. So humble was he that he even begged the seminarians in his seminary to pray to God for him. Whenever the clock struck the hour, he stood for prayer and recited: ``O Theotokos and Virgin, rejoice!" When he was ill-which, for him, was often-he begged each of the seminarians to recite ``Our Father" five times on his behalf while meditating on the five wounds of the Lord Jesus Christ. On one occasion, St. Barbara appeared to him with a smile and said, ``Why do you pray in the Latin manner?"-meaning, why do you pray to God with such brief prayers? At this reproach, even though it was gentle, he became despondent, but she encouraged him, saying: ``Do not be afraid!" On another occasion, St. Orestes the Martyr (November 10) appeared to him, just as St. Dimitri had finished writing the saint's life, and said: ``I endured greater tortures for Christ than those you have written." He then showed him his left side and said: ``This was pierced with a red-hot iron." He then showed him his left hand and said: ``There I was slashed." Finally, he showed him his leg above the knee and said: ``And this was cut off by a scythe." When St. Dimitri wondered if this Orestes visiting him was one of the Five Companions (December 13), the saint discerned his thought and said: ``I am not the one of the Five Companions but rather the one whose life you have just written."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's terrible punishment of Herod (**Acts 12**):

1. How, in his pride, Herod elevated himself, and the people glorified him as a god;
2. How an angel of God struck him at once, because he gave not God the glory;
3. How he was consumed by worms and died.

HOMILY

-on prayer to God to save a soul from the dust-

Deliver me out of the dust that I sink not (Psalm 69:14).

Brethren, our souls are clothed in dust, and our bodies of dust are given us for the service of our soul. May our souls not drown in dust! May our souls not be enslaved by dust! May the living spark not be extinguished in the grave of dust! Very spacious is the field of earthly dust that draws us to itself; but even more spacious is the immeasurable Kingdom of the Spirit that calls our soul its kin. Truly, we are related to the earth through physical dust; but we are related to heaven through the soul. We are dwellers in temporary huts and soldiers in temporary tents. O Lord, **Deliver me out of the dust!** Thus prayed the repentant king who initially had given himself over to dust, until he saw how dust pulls us into the abyss of destruction. Dust is the body of man with its fantasies; dust is also all wicked men who wage war against the righteous; dust is the demons with their terrors. May the Lord save us from all this dust, for He alone is able to do that. We should strive first of all to see the enemy within ourselves-the enemy who attracts other enemies. Hence, the greatest misfortune of the sinner is that he, unconsciously and unwillingly, is an ally of his own enemies! However, the righteous man has strengthened his soul in God and in the Kingdom of God, and is not afraid. He is not afraid of himself, and therefore is not afraid of his other enemies. He is not afraid, because he is neither an ally nor an accomplice of the enemies of his soul. Hence, neither men nor demons can do him any harm. God is his ally and the angels of God are his protectors-what can man do to him? What can demons do to him? What can dust do to him?

O Lord our God, Three Persons and One Being, Who breathed living souls into the dust of our bodies, save us according to Thy mercy that we sink not.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYR ANASTASIA THE ROMAN

She was born in Rome of noble parents, and was left an orphan at the age of three. As an orphan, she was taken to a convent near Rome where the abbess was Sophia, a nun of the highest level of perfection. After seventeen years, Anastasia was well known-among the Christians as a great ascetic, and among the pagans as a rare beauty. Probus, the pagan governor, heard of Anastasia and sent his soldiers to bring her to him. For two hours, the good Abbess Sophia counseled Anastasia how to keep the Faith, how to resist flattering deceits, and how to endure torture. Anastasia said to her: "My heart is ready to suffer for Christ; my soul is ready to die for my Sweet Jesus." Brought before the governor, Anastasia openly expressed her faith in Christ the Lord, and when the governor tried to turn her away from the Faith-first by promises and then by threats-the martyr said to him: "I am ready to die for my Lord not only once, but-oh, if it were only possible-a hundred times!" When they stripped her naked to humiliate her, she cried out to the servants: "Whip me, cut me up and tear me apart, cover my naked body with wounds and cover my shame with blood!" She was beaten, torn and cut up. On two occasions she felt a great thirst and asked for water, and a Christian, Cyril, gave her a drink, for which he was blessed by the martyr of Christ and beheaded by the pagans. Anastasia's breasts and tongue were severed, but an angel of God appeared and sustained her. Finally, she was beheaded outside the city. Blessed Sophia found her body and buried it honorably. Anastasia was crowned with the wreath of martyrdom during the reign of Decius.

2. THE VENERABLE ABRAMIUS THE RECLUSE AND HIS NIECE MARY

Forced to do so by his parents, he married, but on the very day of his wedding he left his bride, his parents' home and all that he possessed, and withdrew into solitude to live a life of strict asceticism. He labored thus for fifty years, and left his cell only twice during that time. The first time, he left at the order of his bishop to convert a pagan village to the Christian Faith. The second time he came out to save his licentious niece Mary. He entered peacefully into rest in the year 360, at the age of seventy. (See "Reflection" below.)

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR TIMOTHY OF ESPHIGMENOU

He was from the village of Kessana in Thrace. He was married and had two daughters. His wife was seized by the Turks and became a Moslem. In order to save his wife from the harem, he pretended to become a Moslem. After rescuing his wife, he conducted her to a convent, while he went to the Great Lavra on Mount Athos and then to the Monastery of Esphigmenou. He desired martyrdom for Christ, like Agathangelus of Esphigmenou, and was beheaded in Jedrene on October 29, 1820. His body was thrown into a river, but his clothing was retrieved by Elder Germanus, the spiritual father of Esphigmenou.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE ABRAMIUS THE RECLUSE

St. Abramius left his bride
And dedicated his life to strict asceticism.
By asceticism he worked out his salvation,
And wisely directed others to salvation.
Demonic power attacked the saint,
But in the name of Christ he crushed it.
The demon took on various, horrible guises,
To scare and hinder the man of God.
This man of God did not allow himself to fear,
Or separate his mind from God,
But shone on the world like a candle,
Glorifying the One God, the Most-holy Trinity.
Imprisoned, alone and not wanted by the world,
Abramius became a prisoner for the sake of Christ
For fifty years-fifty years!
Of tears, fasting and struggle-all for the Son of God:
For fifty years-fifty years!
Established on Christ, the firm Foundation.
Glory to Abramius, Christ's soldier,
That, on the mortal earth, he has shown us immortality!

REFLECTION

But he that endureth to the end shall be saved (Matthew 10:22), said the Lord. Faith is the only light of endurance, for endurance in and of itself implies unbearable darkness. Faith is the shining star in this darkness; faith eases the sharpness of suffering; it bears on its wings all the weight of endurance. St. Abramius gives us a beautiful example of perseverance in endurance. The vexation that the devil caused him by a multitude of temptations and terrors would have driven lesser men to leave one place for another. But Abramius did not want to move, so as not to give the evil demon a cause to rejoice; he remained in his place and defeated the devil. The bishop of that region sent Abramius to a pagan village to convert the villagers to the Christian Faith. After long hesitation, Abramius set out, saying: "Let it be as God wills-I will go out of obedience." He first built a church in that village. Then he smashed all the idols in plain sight of the villagers. They beat him and whipped him half to death, and drove him from their village. But he prayed to God with tears for them, that the Lord would open the eyes of their hearts to know the truth of Christ. And so the pagans continually beat and abused him over the course of three years, but he constantly prayed to God for them, and was not angered with them, enduring in the Faith as a firm rock. And only after three years of labor, tears, forgiveness and faith, was he rewarded. Suddenly, the consciences of the villagers were awakened and they all came together to Abramius, bowing before him, and receiving the Christian Faith from him.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the terrible punishment by which Paul punished the magician (**Acts 13**):

1. How a certain Jewish magician held Sergius the deputy under his dark power;
2. How Paul, by a word, blinded that magician;
3. How the deputy saw that miracle, believed in Christ and was baptized.

HOMILY

-on the glory of the name of God-

And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen (Psalm 72:19).

From the grace-filled heart of the prophet flow words full of grace. The prophet speaks of the King and the King's Son, the most unusual King Who has ever appeared on earth. **May His name be blessed forever (Psalm 72:17)**, the prophet said, and then, as if that were not enough, he said it again and added: **His glorious name**. The Church of Christ is the glory of Christ. Blessed is His Holy Church-the fruit of His labors, the wreath of His humiliation, the work of His hands, and the flower of His blood! Blessed is the very name of His Church-holy and salvific! And with His Church, that is, with His work and with His glory, the whole earth shall be filled. By the words, **Forever and ever**, the prophet foretold the immortal work of Christ, that is, His Church. She will be built in time and will be revealed in eternity. She will be built until the end of time, and will be revealed whole in eternity.

O my brethren, let us strive that our souls may be built into Christ's Church, into that living and immortal body whose life has no end, and whose beauty is indescribable. Let us strive that we are not rejected as unsuitable and useless stones, to be cast into the abyss of eternal darkness.

O Lord Jesus Christ, King and Son of the King, write us also in the book of immortality, and remember us in Thy Heavenly Kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HIEROMARTYR ZENOBIUS AND HIS SISTER ZENOBIA

They were from the town of Aegea in Cilicia. They inherited the true Faith and great material wealth from their parents. Working zealously for the Faith and with great love, they distributed all their wealth to the poor. Because their hands were so generous, the hand of God shielded them from every evil intent of men and demons. The generous hands of Zenobius, which gave to the poor, were endowed by God with the gift of miracle-working, and Zenobius healed the sick of every kind of infirmity merely by touching them. Zenobius was appointed Bishop of Aegea. During a persecution, the Prefect Lysias arrested him and said: "I offer you two choices: life or death; life if you worship the gods, or death if you do not." St. Zenobius replied: "Life without Christ is not life but death, whereas death for the sake of Christ is not death but life." When Zenobius was subjected to cruel tortures, Zenobia came to the judge and said: "I also want to drink from this cup of suffering, and be crowned with that wreath." After being tortured in fire and in boiling pitch, both were beheaded with the sword in about the year 285. Thus this brother and sister took up their habitation in the Kingdom of the Immortal Christ the King.

2. THE HOLY APOSTLES CLEOPAS, TERTIUS, MARK, JUSTUS AND ARTEMAS

They were all numbered among the Seventy. The risen Lord appeared to Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24:13-33**). Tertius wrote down the Epistle to the Romans for Paul (**Romans 16:22**), and died a martyr as Bishop of Iconium after the Apostle Sosipater (November 10). St. Mark (or John) was the son of the devout Mary (whose home was a refuge for the apostles and the first Christians), and a kinsman of Barnabas (**Acts 12:12**). He became the bishop of the Samaritan town of Apollonia. Justus was a son of Joseph the Betrothed. Together with Matthias, he was one of those selected as a possible replacement for Judas the traitor, but he was not chosen. He suffered for the Gospel as a bishop in Eleutheropolis. St. Artemas was Bishop of Lystra in Lycaonia, and reposed peacefully.

3. THE HOLY KING MILUTIN

Milutin was the son of Uro I and Queen Helena and brother of Dragutin. He fought many battles defending his Faith and his people. He fought against Emperor Michael Palaeologus because Palaeologus accepted union with Rome and tried to force the Balkan peoples and the monks of Athos to recognize the pope. He fought against Shishman, King of Bulgaria, and Nogai, King of the Tartars, in order to defend his lands. All his wars were successful, for he constantly prayed to God and hoped in God. He built more than forty churches: beside those that he built in his own land-Treskavac, Grachanica, St. George in Nagorich, the Church of the Holy Theotokos in Skoplje, Banjska and so forth-he also built churches outside of his land, in Thessalonica, Sofia, Constantinople, Jerusalem and the Holy Mountain. He entered into rest in the Lord on October 29, 1320. His body was soon shown to be incorrupt and miracle-working; and as such, it reposes even today in the Church of the Holy King in Sofia, Bulgaria.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY KING MILUTIN

The saint of God, Milutin the gallant,
Had a great and difficult task:
To defend the Faith against evil schismatics,
And the people against many cruel tyrants.
He was a scourge to Palaeologus, and a scourge to the Latins-
Milutin triumphed over all the unbelievers.
The Orthodox Faith was his great treasure,
As it was Justinian's crown of pearls!
And, like Justinian, he built many churches,
And raised up glory to the glorious Christ throughout the world.
Royally he attended to matters imperial,
But his mind was not parted from Christ God.
Thus, pure and innocent in heart was he,
A venerable mind in the whirlpool of the world.
God, Who looks at the heart and judges accordingly,
Granted King Milutin immortality-
Immortality of soul, and an incorrupt body.
And lo, our holy king, even now, is intact!
As you fear no man, O wondrous King,
Be our defender before the Living God,
That he forgive our sinful monstrosities,
And vouchsafe us, with you, the Heavenly Kingdom.

REFLECTION

A great son of the Orthodox Church, King Milutin saved the Balkans from Uniatism. At that time in history when the Byzantine emperor's conscience was weakened, this noble and God-bearing Slavic king rose up decisively and, with God's help, saved Orthodoxy-not only in his own land, but also in all the lands of the Balkans. He who closely examines the life of the holy King Milutin will understand why God gave him success after success in all his works throughout his life. When Milutin ascended the throne, he immediately vowed to God that he would build a church for each year that he would reign. He reigned forty-two years and built forty-two churches. Next to some of the churches-for example, in Thessalonica and Constantinople-he also built hospitals for the indigent, where the poor would receive everything free of charge. Beyond that, he especially loved to give alms to the needy from his own enormous wealth. Oftentimes, this powerful and wealthy king dressed in the clothes of a poor man and, with two or three of his servants, walked among the people at night and asked about their misfortunes, and gave to them abundantly. He lived a very simple, familial life, even in the midst of his great wealth-though he never seemed that way to foreigners. He had become accustomed to a simple life while still at the home of his father, King Uro I. It is told how Emperor Michael Palaeologus sent his daughter Anna with a retinue to the court of King Uro, as an offering to Milutin, in order to lure the Serbian king into union with Rome. But King Uro, seeing the foolish extravagance of the princess and her retinue, said: "What is this, and what is it for? We are not used to such a life." And pointing to a Serbian princess with a distaff in her hand, he said: "Behold, this is the kind of clothing we expect our daughter-in-law to wear."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the miraculous healing of the crippled man (**Acts 14**):

1. How there was a man in Lystra who had never stood on his feet;
2. How he beheld Paul and believed in the Gospel;
3. How Paul, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, healed the man-who **leaped and walked**.

HOMILY

-on the desire for God-the only desire of the righteous-

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee (Psalm 73:25).

In heaven and on earth, there is one supreme good for the soul of an awakened man. That good is God. There is countless good in heaven, but the King of heaven is the greatest good. There is countless good on earth, but the Creator of all of this good is incomparable. That is why the soul of the awakened man asks: "What could I have or what could I desire, either in heaven or on earth, beside Thee?" Is the river necessary to the one who is brought to drink at its source? Does one who sits at the king's table desire the shepherd's dinner? God alone is sufficient in Himself to satisfy all of men's hunger and thirst. The heavens are God's, the earth is God's. The Lord of all good is the greatest good; the Creator of all sweetness is the greatest sweetness; the Bearer of all wisdom is the greatest wisdom; the Source of all power and mercy is the greatest power and mercy; the Creator of every kind of beauty in heaven and on earth is the greatest beauty. No kind of good can enter the heart of man-whether openly or in a dream-that is not already in God to the highest degree.

Therefore, my brethren, let us ask God that we may receive all; let us seek God that we may find all; let us become rich in God that we may be rich in all.

O Lord our God, come near us when our souls seek Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES STACHYS, AMPLIAS, URBAN, NARCISSUS, APELLES AND ARISTOBULUS

They were all of the Seventy. Stachys was an assistant to St. Andrew the First-called. St. Andrew appointed him Bishop of Byzantium. He established the church in Argyropolis and governed his flock faithfully and zealously. After sixteen years as bishop, he entered peacefully into rest in the Lord. Amplias and Urban worked likewise with St. Andrew, and were ordained bishops by him-Amplias in Lydda of Odyssopolis in Judea, and Urban in Macedonia. Both died as martyrs for Christ the Lord. Narcissus was appointed Bishop of Athens by the Apostle Philip. St. Apelles was Bishop of Heraclea in Trachis. Aristobulus, brother of the Apostle Barnabas, preached the Christian Faith in Britain and reposed peacefully there.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR EPIMACHUS

He was born in Egypt and labored there in asceticism, ending his earthly life as a martyr. Imitating St. John the Baptist, he withdrew to the wilderness while still a youth. Because of his great love for God, the Spirit of God led him to every truth and, with no other teacher, taught him how to live a life of asceticism. Then, Epimachus learned that the unbelievers were torturing and killing Christians in Alexandria for the sake of Christ. All aflame with zeal for the Faith, he went to the city and smashed the idols. When the pagans tortured him for this, he cried out: "Smite me, spit on me, put a crown of thorns on my head, put a reed in my hand, give me gall to drink, crucify me on a cross, and pierce me with a spear! This is what my Lord endured, and I too want to endure it." In the crowd of people who witnessed the torturing of St. Epimachus, there was a woman who was blind in one eye. She wept bitterly, watching the heartless torture of this God-pleaser. When the tormentors scraped the body of the holy martyr of Christ, blood spurted from him, and one drop of blood touched the blind eye of that woman. Suddenly, her blind eye regained vision, and was as whole as the other. Then she cried out: "Great is the God in whom this sufferer believes!" After this they beheaded St. Epimachus and his soul took up habitation in eternal joy, in about the year 250.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR NICHOLAS OF CHIOS

Nicholas was a pious youth and a great zealot for the Christian Faith. He was born in the village of Karyes on the island of Chios, where he was tortured and beheaded by the Turks in the year 1754, and gave his righteous soul to God.

4. THE VENERABLE SPYRIDON AND NICODEMUS

They were monks and prosphora-bakers in the Monastery of the Kiev Caves. Though illiterate, Spyridon knew the entire Psalter by heart and worked many miracles during his lifetime. He entered into rest in the year 1148.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR EPIMACHUS

Epimachus, the saint of God,
Felt no fear in his heart,
Either of men or of devils,
And even less of dead idols.
Epimachus rejoiced in his torture;
With his smile he whipped the judge.
His body in torment, his mind in heaven,
Epimachus was adorned with wounds.
He wanted to suffer like Christ,
To stand as a martyr before Christ-
And what he desired, God gave him,
And endowed him with wondrous power
To heal the infirmities of the people,
And to gladden men with grace.
A knight of Christ with the sign of the Cross,
A precious stone among precious stones,
Epimachus shines like a star-
A soul such as only Christ can raise.
O Epimachus, wondrous martyr
And glorious prisoner of the true Faith:
Defend us from evil by your prayers,
And protect the Church of God unto the end.

REFLECTION

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me, said the Lord (**Matthew 10:38**). The holy and venerable Martyr Timothy of Esphigmenou (October 29) was at first a married man and had two daughters. Later, as a monk, he decided to suffer for the sake of Christ. Already prepared for the path of suffering, he begged the abbot for a blessing to stop by his village of Kessana to say farewell to his daughters. The abbot would not allow him to do that out of fear that a meeting with his two daughters would soften him, and turn him away from martyrdom for the Faith. But Kessana lay on the road to Propontis, where Timothy was headed. When he got to his village, he met a former neighbor, conversed with him and gave him a farewell message for his daughters. In vain, the neighbor begged him to stay and see his daughters, and rest. Timothy went hurriedly on his way. The daughters heard about their father from the neighbor and ran to see him. And now was seen a rare and majestic sight. The daughters raced to overtake and embrace their father, while the father fled from his daughters, so as not to transgress the command of his abbot. The daughters ran quickly but their father ran even faster. The daughters hurried to embrace their father, and Timothy, fleeing from them, hurried to embrace death. The daughters became weary and turned back in despair, and their father disappeared. Before his death Timothy begged his spiritual father, Germanus, to stop by his village and inform his daughters of his end by martyrdom. The Turks then beheaded Timothy and threw his body into a river. Germanus succeeded in retrieving just one garment from the martyr. He brought it to Kessana, found Timothy's daughters and related their father's heroic death to them, and showed them his garment.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the miraculous guidance of the apostles by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16):

1. How Paul and Silas wanted to go from Mysia to Bithynia;
2. How the Spirit would not allow it;
3. How, in a vision at midnight, a Macedonian man appeared to Paul and summoned him to come to Macedonia.

HOMILY

-on the certainty of the righteous one that he shall not die-

I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord (Psalm 117:17).

Who can say: **I shall not die?** He who cleaves to the Living Lord. Who can confirm with confidence: but [I shall] **live?** He who sees the Living Lord before him. Enoch and Elias did not die, but were taken into eternal life. The Lord took them in His mercy, and as proof to mankind of immortal life. Jesus Christ the Lord died and resurrected in accordance with His power, and as proof to mankind of the resurrection from the dead. The apostles and saints were slain, but many of them appeared from the other world in their love for mankind, and as proof to mankind of eternal life. Thus, those who were taken up to heaven in the flesh and those whose bodies reposed, live with the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ in the Immortal Kingdom. **I shall not die, but live**, said King David with great certainty, even though he lived on earth before the Resurrection of the Lord, and before the announcement of the General Resurrection of the righteous. With still more certainty, each of us Christians must speak this too: **I shall not die, but live**, for the resurrected Lord is the foundation of our Faith, and our eyes have seen and our ears have heard more-much more-than the eyes and ears of King David. After the Cross of Christ, the devil became as smoke; and after His Resurrection, death became like a mere fog through which one passes to the sunlit field of immortality. Blessed is he, brethren, who becomes worthy to **live, and declare the works of the Lord**.

O Living Lord, enliven us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER - 1 -

1. SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN

Cosmas and Damian were unmercenaries and miracle-workers. They were brothers both in the flesh and in the spirit, born somewhere in Asia Minor of a pagan father and a Christian mother. After their father's death, their mother Theodotia devoted all her time and effort to educating her sons and raising them as true Christians. God helped her, and her sons matured as sweet fruit and luminaries of the world. They were learned in the art of medicine and ministered to the sick without payment, not so much with medicine as by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were called "unmercenary physicians," that is, unpaid physicians, for they healed freely and thus fulfilled the commandment of Christ: **Freely ye have received, freely give (Matthew 10:8)**. So careful were they in healing men free of charge that Cosmas became very angry with his brother Damian because he accepted three eggs from a woman, Palladia, and ordered that he not be buried alongside his brother Damian after his death. In fact, St. Damian did not accept these three eggs as a reward for healing the ailing Palladia, but rather because she adjured him in the name of the Most-holy Trinity to accept these three eggs. Nevertheless, after their death in the town of Fereman, they were buried together according to a revelation from God. The holy brothers were great miracle-workers both during their life and after their death. A snake crawled through the mouth and into the stomach of a certain farm laborer during his sleep, and the unfortunate man would have died in the greatest pain had he not, in the last moment, invoked the help of Saints Cosmas and Damian. Thus, the Lord glorified forever the miracle-working of those who glorified Him on earth by their faith, purity and mercy.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR HERMENEGILD THE HEIR

Hermenegild was the son of the Gothic King Leovigild who adhered to the Arian heresy. However, Hermenegild did not turn away from Orthodoxy in spite of all the flatteries and threats of his cruel heretical father. His father cast him into prison and, early on Pascha, sent a heretical bishop to administer Communion to him. But the God-pleaser refused to receive Communion at the hands of a heretic, and the heretical bishop informed the king about this. The king became angry and ordered the executioner to behead Hermenegild in the year 586. Leovigild later repented that he had killed his son; he renounced his heresy and returned to Orthodoxy.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR JAMES WITH HIS DISCIPLES JAMES AND DIONYSIUS

James was born in the Diocese of Castoria of parents named Martin and Parasceva. Working as a shepherd James became wealthy, and by this incurred the envy of his brother, who maligned him to the Turks as having found some treasure in the ground. James fled to Constantinople where he again became very wealthy. Once, James was the guest of a Turkish Bey. The Turks ate meat and James fasted. Then the Bey said: "Great is your Christian Faith!" And he related how his wife had been mentally ill and how he, after all the physicians and cures had failed, took her to the patriarch for prayers to be read over her. As soon as the patriarch opened the book to read, a heavenly light shone forth in the church. After the completion of the prayer, his wife was made whole. Hearing how the Turk extolled the Christian Faith, James distributed all his goods and went to the Holy Mountain, where he was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of Iveron. He lived a life of asceticism on the Holy Mountain and suffered for the Faith at the hands of the Turks in Jedrene on November 1, 1520. His miracle-working relics and those of his disciples, James and Dionysius, repose in the Monastery of St. Anastasia in Galakistou near Thessalonica.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN

The Church glorifies the miracle-working physicians,
Shining stars that shine with the Lord,
St. Cosmas and St. Damian,
Two Christians, wondrous giants.
Theodotia was the mother of these sons;
She nourished these giants.
The glorious brothers fulfilled the law,
And by their mercy pleased Christ.
They pleased Christ, the Merciful One,
The greatest Unmercenary Physician.
They received the gift, and became physicians;
They received the gift, but did not sell it.
They gave the gifts of God to the poor,
And in the name of Christ healed them.
Time has not covered God's saints with darkness;
Thus it has always been, and thus it is now.
Nor has it covered the wonderworking physicians;
They shine today as they once did,
And help the infirm and the unfortunate
By mighty and willing prayers
Before Christ's heavenly throne.
Honor and glory to the wondrous physicians!

REFLECTION

St. Hilarion of Meglin fought a great battle against the Bogomils. At one time, the leaders of the Bogomils met with Hilarion and began to debate with him about faith. The Bogomils taught that God created the spiritual world and that the devil created the material world. To this, Hilarion replied to them that in Holy Scripture it is written: **For God is the King of all the earth (Psalm 47:7)** and also: **The earth is the Lord's and all its fullness (Psalm 24:1)**. The Bogomils claimed that the Old Testament is of the devil. To them, the saint replied: "If the Old Testament indeed proceeded from the devil would Christ have said, **Search the Scriptures ... and they are they which testify of Me (John 5:39)**, and would He have acknowledged as the greatest commandments those about love toward God and one's neighbor which, at one time, were given through Moses?" The Bogomils also claimed that the body of Christ was brought from heaven. To this, St. Hilarion replied to them that had it been so, then the body of Christ would have felt neither hunger nor thirst, nor weariness nor suffering, nor would it have been susceptible to death. The Bogomils then expressed their disapproval of the sign of the Cross which Orthodox Christians use. The saint replied to them: "And what will you do when the sign of the Son of Man, His Cross, appears in the heavens, and when all nations of the earth who do not believe in the Cross will weep?" And he also said to them: "How is it that you say that all evil is from evil material, and meanwhile you do not reverence that Wood by which the whole material world was sanctified?"

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous power of the apostles' words (**Acts 16**):

1. How Paul and Silas spoke to the assembled women alongside the water at Philippi;
2. How the Lord opened the heart of the woman Lydia, and she and her household were baptized.

HOMILY

-on the call to all Christians to become saints-

To the saints which are at Ephesus (Ephesians 1:1).

The Apostle calls the Christians in Ephesus saints. He does not call one or two of them saints, nor one group of them, but all of them. Is this not a wondrous miracle of God for people, not in the wilderness but in a city-and an idolatrous and corrupt city-to become saints? That married men who sire children, who trade and work, become saints! Indeed, such were the first Christians. Their dedication, fidelity and zeal in the Faith as well as their holiness and purity of life, completely justified their being called saints. If in latter times saints have become the exception, in those earlier times the unholy were the exception. Saints were the rule. Therefore, we must not wonder that the Apostle calls all baptized souls in Ephesus "saints" and that he has an even loftier name for all Christians, i.e., "sons," the sons of God (**Galatians 4:6**). Christ the Lord Himself gave us the right to call ourselves such when He taught us to address God as **Our Father (Matthew 6:9)**.

O my brethren, do we not say to God every day: "Holy God?" Do we not call the angels holy? Do we not call the Mother of God holy? And the prophets, apostles, martyrs and the righteous? Do we not call heaven holy and the Kingdom of Heaven holy? Who then is able to enter into the holy Kingdom but the saints? Therefore, if we have hope for salvation, we also have hope for holiness.

O Holy God, Who dwellest in the holy place and resteth among the saints and callest the holy to Thyself and showest mercy to them, help us also that we may become holy-in words, in thoughts and in deeds-to Thy glory and our salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 2 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS ACYNDINUS, PEGASIUS, ANEMPODISTUS, APHTHONIUS, ELPIDEPHORUS AND OTHERS WITH THEM

They were all Christians from Persia and suffered during the reign of King Sapor in the year 355. The first three were servants at the court of this same king but secretly served Christ their Lord. When they were accused and brought to trial before the king, he asked them where they came from. To this they replied: "Our fatherland and our life is the Most-holy Trinity, one in Essence and undivided, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God." The king subjected them to cruel tortures but they endured all heroically, with psalmody and prayer on their lips. During the time of their torture and imprisonment angels of God appeared to them many times, and one time the Lord Christ Himself appeared to them as a man "with a face radiant as the sun." When one of the torturers, Aphthonius, beheld a miracle, when boiling lead did no harm to the martyrs, he believed in Christ and cried out: "Great is the Christian God!" For this, he was immediately beheaded, and many others saw and believed. Then the king ordered that Acyndinus, Pegasus and Anempodistus be sewn into animal skins and cast into the sea. But St. Aphthonius appeared from the other world with three shining angels, and led the holy martyrs to dry land and set them free. Elpidaphorus was one of the king's nobles. When he revealed that he was a Christian and denounced the king for his slaughter of innocent Christians, the king condemned him to death and Elpidaphorus was beheaded along with seven thousand other Christians. Then those first three martyrs [Acyndinus, Pegasus and Anempodistus] were finally thrown into a burning furnace along with twenty-eight soldiers and the king's mother, since they also believed in Christ-and thus, in the flames, they gave up their righteous souls into the hands of the Lord.

2. THE VENERABLE MARCIAN OF CYRUS

Marcian was from the town of Cyrus in Syria. He was distinguished by his noble ancestry as well as by his physical beauty. He left all for the sake of Christ and withdrew into the wilderness of Halkis to live as a hermit. He was a contemporary of Patriarch Flavian of Antioch and the Emperors Constantius and Valens. A heavenly light shone in his cell at night by which he read the Holy Scriptures, and he never had need of any other light. He was a great miracle-worker both during his life and after death. Before his death, he ordered his disciple Eusebius to conceal his body and bury it secretly because of his many admirers. He entered into rest in the Lord in 387.

3. THE HIEROMARTYR VICTORINUS, BISHOP OF PATAV

Many maintain that he was a Slovene by ancestry. Blessed Jerome points him out as a learned and devout man. He knew Greek better than Latin. He wrote the interpretations of several books of the New and Old Testaments. He suffered for the Christian Faith in about the year 303.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS ACYNDINUS, PEGASIUS, ANEMPODISTUS, APHTHONIUS AND ELPIDEPHORUS

The martyr Acyndinus and with him Pegasus,
Courageous Anempodistus and with him Aphthonius,
And the gentle Elpidaphorus, a royal dignitary:
All-sacrificial lambs, snow-white lambs.
They showed themselves servants of the Most-holy Trinity,
And declared Christ to Sapor, face to face.
For them, martyrdom was a celebration.
Christ was dearer to them than youth and health;
Christ was dearer to them than royal delights;
Christ was dearer to them than royal honors.
Whatever the world gave them, they gave away for Christ;
They fell as noble sacrifices for Christ;
They fell in disgrace and rose in radiance;
They fell on earth and rose in Paradise.
For the Church on earth, they shed their blood;
In the heavenly Church they completed the edifice of their souls.
Filled with love for the Christian race,
They now pray to the risen Christ
That He preserve the Church on earth from misfortune,
And lead it to the final victory.

REFLECTION

How will one who transgresses love toward his parents raise himself toward love for his enemies? Love for one's parents-this is the main and fundamental school of love. Without this school, one can go no further. The Serbian King Dragutin rose up against his father with an army in order to sit on his father's throne. But it so happened that he later broke his leg, and this awakened in him pangs of conscience which did not leave him in peace until his death. Dragutin withdrew from the throne and relinquished his authority to his younger brother Milutin, and began to widely distribute alms, build churches, and perform other good works. In addition to this, he lived a strict life of asceticism in secret. He girded himself with a belt of reeds around his naked body, dressed in coarse sackcloth, and prayed to God at night in a secretly dug grave. This penitent king did all this only that God would forgive him the sin of lack of love toward his parents, and God forgave him. Many holy martyrs joyfully received their executioners who were seeking them, and treated them hospitably in their homes while they themselves prepared for death. To entertain one's mortal enemies-is this not an expression of great love toward one's enemies? When King Sapor harshly tortured Acyndinus, Pegasus and others with them, he suddenly went mad, became dumb and unable to speak, and began to claw his face with great fury. Seeing his tormentor in such despair, St. Acyndinus wept and prayed to God for the king and said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, speak!" and the king's tongue was loosed and he began to speak. Here is an example of true love for one's enemies!

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous power of the apostles' words (**Acts 16**):

1. How a certain slave girl with an unclean spirit of divination cried out after Paul and Silas;
2. How Paul turned and said to the spirit, **I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her;**
3. How the unclean spirit at that same hour came out of the slave girl.

HOMILY

-on the will of God that all Christians should be holy-

According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4).

Only the Church teaches and demonstrates that first there was a plan for the world and then the world was created. That plan was in the wisdom and will and power of God. And we Christians, as the Church of God, are in this plan. According to this plan, God chose us **before the foundation of the world** for holiness and righteousness and love. God chose us beforehand and adopted us through Him-through Whom? Through the Lord Jesus Christ. For all that we are to God, we are to Him through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ man has no other bond, no other relationship, no other kinship with God, and therefore our choosing and adoption was through our Lord Jesus Christ. He chose us, His Holy Church, **according to the good pleasure of His will (Ephesians 1:5)**, as He had once chosen Israel from among all the nations on earth. Let no one say that this choosing of God destroys man's free will, so that neither does a Christian have merit because he is a Christian, nor is a pagan condemned because he is a pagan. No, this is a totally erroneous interpretation. For at one time God also chose Israel and some in Israel perished while some were saved. He also chose His Holy Church, calling all nations and peoples to it. But the salvation of those among the chosen does not depend on God's choice alone, but also on man's will and effort.

O eternal God, our Creator, Who chose us for salvation before Thou hadst even created us, have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 3 -

1. THE HIEROMARTYR ACEPSIMAS, BISHOP OF NAESON, AND OTHERS WITH HIM

The eighty-year-old Acepsimas, filled with every Christian virtue, was sitting one day in his home with guests. Just then a child, filled with the Spirit of God, ran up to the aged bishop, kissed him on the head and said: "Blessed is this head, for it will receive suffering for Christ." This prophecy was soon fulfilled. King Sapor raised a bitter persecution of Christians throughout Persia, and St. Acepsimas was apprehended. He was brought before a prince who was also a pagan priest. As the bishop was arrested and bound, a member of his household asked him what should be done with his home if he were martyred. The saint replied: "It is no longer my home. I am going to a home on high and will not return." After prolonged interrogation he was thrown into prison. The following day Joseph, a seventy-year-old presbyter, and Aithalas, a deacon, were also imprisoned. After three years of imprisonment and many tortures, Acepsimas was beheaded. Joseph and Aithalas were buried up to their waists in the ground, and the soulless pagans forced Christians to stone them. That night, by God's providence, Joseph's body disappeared, and a myrtle tree grew over Aithalas's body that healed every kind of disease and pain of men. This tree stood for five years before the wicked and envious pagans cut it down. These soldiers of Christ suffered in Persia in the fourth century, during the time of the pagan King Sapor.

2. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR GEORGE

On this day we commemorate the translation of the relics of St. George, from Nicomedia, where he suffered at the time of Emperor Diocletian, to the city of Lydda in Palestine. The suffering of this wonderful saint is described on April 23. Anticipating his martyrdom, St. George begged his servant to take his relics to Palestine, where his mother had been born, and where he had distributed his large estate to the poor. The servant did so. During the reign of Emperor Constantine, pious Christians built a beautiful church to St. George in Lydda and, upon the consecration of that church, the relics of the saint were interred there. Innumerable miracles have occurred from these miracle-working relics of St. George, the great-martyr of Christ.

3. THE VENERABLE ELIAS THE EGYPTIAN

Elias labored in asceticism near Antioch, the principle city of the Thebaid. For seventy years, he lived among the arid and inaccessible rocks of the desert. He ate only bread and dates and, in his youth, fasted for weeks at a time. He healed all manner of pains and ailments of the people. He eventually became very shaky in his old age, and entered into the joy of his Lord at the age of 110. Elias said: "Guard your mind from evil thoughts concerning your neighbors, knowing that the demons put them there, aiming to blind you to your own sins and prevent you from directing yourself toward God."

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR GEORGE

O George the martyr,
O George the victor:
Through suffering, you conquered,
And through death you have been glorified.
You held all things to be of less value
Than truth, O George.
You gave up earthly power and honor,
And stood beside the Living Christ.

O George the martyr,
O George the victor:
Pierced and broken with horrible tortures,
You were sustained by God's hand.
All your pains were as nothing-
By the power of God's mighty hand.
We all bow down before you
And glorify your name.

O Martyr George,
O Victor George:
Have mercy on us now,
By your prayers, protect us
Before the throne of Christ God,
Our Almighty Savior;
And pray that we not fear torture,
And that, by patience, we conquer!

REFLECTION

Among the countless miracles of St. George, this one is recorded: On the island of Mytilene there was a church dedicated to St. George the Great-martyr and Trophy-bearer. All the inhabitants of the island would come to this church on the annual feast of their patron saint. Knowing of this, the Saracens of Crete once attacked this island on its feast day, pillaged the island, and enslaved its inhabitants, taking many of them back to Crete. Among the enslaved was a handsome young man, whom the pirates gave to their prince. The prince made him his servant. The young man's parents were overwhelmed with great sorrow for their son. After a year had passed and St. George's day came again, the grieving parents, following the ancient custom, prepared a table and entertained many guests. Remembering her son, the poor mother went to the icon of the saint, fell to the ground and began to pray that he somehow deliver her son from slavery. The mother then returned to her guests at the table. The host raised a glass and drank a toast to the honor of St. George. Just then their son appeared among them, holding a decanter of wine in his hand. In amazement and fear, they asked him how he had managed to come to them. He replied that as he was about to serve his master wine in Crete, a knight on horseback appeared before him, pulled him up onto the horse and carried him instantly to his parents' home. All were amazed, and glorified God and His wonderful saint, George the Commander and Victory-bearer.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous deliverance of Paul and Silas from prison (**Acts 16**):

1. How these holy apostles were cast into the inner prison and their feet were placed in stocks;
2. How they were at prayer, praising God at midnight;
3. How the earth quaked, the chains fell off those who were bound, and the doors of the prison were opened.

HOMILY

-on Christ as the Head of all the saints-

That ... He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth (Ephesians 1:10).

Sin causes panic and confusion. A man drowning in sin and vice is like a chicken with its head cut off which, dying, thrashes about convulsively and rushes to and fro. Before Christ's Incarnation, the whole pagan world was a confused, headless body, dying in convulsions. Christ joined the severed head with the benighted trunk and brought the body of the human race back to life. He is the Head of the heavenly host, and He has always been. And, as the Creating Word of God, He was from the beginning the Head of everything created in the visible world, especially the human race. But sin, like a sword, separated the sinful trunk of Adam from his Head. However, the Lord reconciled heaven and earth in His Incarnation, bringing heaven to earth, and raising earth to heaven, and establishing all of it under His mind, under His headship. Through Christ we are reconciled with the Holy Trinity and the angels of God, with one another, and with the created nature around us. The lost Head has been found and all has been harmoniously arranged beneath it. The Apostle says: **We have the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16)**. As the head is to the physical man, so the mind is to the spiritual inner man. Therefore, if we are Christ's, we must think and judge in all things according to our Head, Jesus Christ, and Him alone. Thinking and judging by Him, we will perceive ourselves as organs of one body that includes other men and the angels: one body, whose Head is Christ. Hence, our love for God is enkindled, and our faith strengthened, and our hope enlightened. Only a sleeping body feels no link with its head. Let us awaken, my brethren, let us awaken while we have time.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our All-wise Head, unite us with Thyself.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 4 -

1. THE VENERABLE IOANNICIUS THE GREAT

The great spiritual light Ioannicius was born in the village of Marycata in the province of Bithynia, of his father Myritricius and his mother Anastasia. As a youth, he was a shepherd. While tending his sheep, he would often retreat into solitude and remain in prayer the whole day, encircling his flock with the sign of the Cross so that the flock would not stray and scatter. Later, he was taken into the army and displayed marvelous courage, particularly in the wars with the Bulgarians. Following his military service, Ioannicius withdrew to Mount Olympus in Asia Minor, where he was tonsured a monk and dedicated himself completely to asceticism until his repose in great old age. He lived in asceticism for over fifty years in various places, and received from God a truly abundant gift of wonderworking. He healed all sicknesses and pains, drove out demons, and tamed wild beasts. He especially had power over snakes, could cross over water as on dry land, could be invisible to men when he so desired, and could foretell future events. He was distinguished by overwhelming humility and meekness. His outward appearance was that of a giant-massive and powerful. He took an active part in the destiny of God's Church. During the iconoclast controversy, he was deceived at first, but later tore himself away from the iconoclast viewpoint and became an ardent champion of the veneration of icons. He had a great friendship with Patriarch Methodius of Constantinople. Ioannicius lived for ninety-four years and entered peacefully into rest in the Lord in the year 846. He was a great miracle-worker both during his life and after his death.

2. THE HIEROMARTYRS NICANDER, BISHOP OF MYRA, AND HERMAS THE PRESBYTER

Nicander and Hermas were both ordained by Apostle Titus. They were both distinguished by their great zeal for the Faith and their great labors in winning pagans for Christ the Lord. Because of this, they were accused before a certain judge, Libanus, who subjected them to bitter tortures. They were stoned and dragged over stones; they were imprisoned, suffered hunger and endured many other tortures that no mortal man could endure without God's special help. The Lord appeared to them in various ways, and when they were thrown into a fiery furnace, the Lord sent His angel to cool the flames for them. Finally, they were buried alive by their cruel torturers. But in vain do men kill those whom the Lord gives life, and in vain do men dishonor those whom the Lord glorifies.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE IOANNICIUS THE GREAT

**Ioannicius served the people,
The people and the prince, with great zeal,
And then withdrew from all and everything
To serve the glory of the Heavenly King.**

**Ioannicius was a great soldier
For the holy Faith and for pure justice;
With tears and labors for half a century
He prayed and prayed to Christ.**

**Glorious Ioannicius was a rich man,
Rich and more than abundant with the power of heaven,
Leading the struggle, and chanting Psalms,
Against every dark and deceitful power.**

**The wondrous saint, Ioannicius,
Worked many wonderful miracles
In the name of Christ and by the power of the Cross,
Mightily destroying the demons' schemes.**

**O Saint of God, Ioannicius,
You found mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ:
Beg mercy also for us sinners,
And from the Holy Spirit, holy grace.**

REFLECTION

Mercy is the fruit of faith. Where there is true faith, there also is true mercy. St. Ioannicius was walking past a monastery one day. Among the many nuns, there were a mother and daughter. Evil spirits continually assaulted the young daughter with bodily temptations, and inflamed the passion of lust in her to such a degree that she wanted to leave the convent to marry. In vain did her mother counsel her to stay. Her daughter would not even hear of it. When the mother saw St. Ioannicius, she begged him to counsel her daughter to remain in the monastery and not expose her soul to perdition in the world. Ioannicius summoned the maiden and said: "Daughter, place your hand on my shoulder!" She did so. Then the compassionate saint prayed to God with a fervent heart that He deliver her from temptation, and that her bodily lust be transferred to him. Thus, it happened. The maiden was completely calmed and remained in the monastery, and the saint of God went on his way. But as he went, the passion of lust was inflamed in him, and his blood began to boil as though on fire. He desired to die rather than to give the passion its way and, seeing a large poisonous snake, ran to it so as to be bitten and to die. But the snake would not bite him. He provoked it to make it bite him, but as soon as he touched it the snake died. At that moment the flame of lust disappeared from Ioannicius.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Lord's coming to Paul in a vision at night (**Acts 18**):

1. How the Lord came to Paul at Corinth, in a nighttime vision;
2. How He told him to fear not and to preach, for He said: **I have much people in this city**;
3. How Paul obeyed and remained there for a year and a half.

HOMILY

-on the heirs of the Kingdom through Christ the Lord-

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance (Ephesians 1:11).

All is from the Lord Jesus Christ, all is through the Lord Jesus Christ, and all is of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without Him, we have no proper ties or normal relationships with God, with men or with other created beings. He is our head and our mind, and through Him **we have obtained an inheritance**. What do we inherit? The Kingdom of God. Why are Christians often called heirs in the New Testament? Inheritance is always associated with someone's passing from this earth. One must die for his heir to inherit. Christians even become heirs while still in this life, for the old man in them dies and the new man comes in his place as heir. The one who outlives the other is the one who inherits. When the body dies, the soul outlives it; the soul therefore inherits all that a man has gathered while in the body, be it good works for salvation or evil works for condemnation. Through the Lord Jesus Christ the inheritance that the Lord Himself rejoiced in is opened to us: the Immortal Kingdom of God. We inherit that Kingdom when we leave the earthly kingdom-when we die to this earth, we will inherit heaven; when we break off the alliance with Satan, we will become fellow heirs in Christ. O my brethren, just think what a rich inheritance awaits us! But let us not sell it cheaply, as Esau sold his birthright!

O Lord Jesus Christ, our God and our Savior, have mercy on us to the end, and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 5 -

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYRS GALACTION AND EPISTEME

Both Galaction and Episteme were born in the city of Edessa, in Phoenicia. Galaction's mother was barren until she was baptized. After her baptism, she converted her husband [Cleiton] to the true Faith, baptized her son Galaction, and raised him in the Christian Faith. When Galaction was old enough to marry, his good mother, Leucippa, entered into rest, and his father betrothed him to a pagan-born maiden named Episteme. By no means did Galaction want to enter into marriage, and convinced Episteme to be baptized, then to be tonsured a nun at the same time that he became a monk. Both of them withdrew to Mount Publion-Galaction to a monastery and Episteme to a convent. They proved to be shining lights in their monasteries. They were first in labor, first in prayer, first in humility and obedience, and first in love. They neither left their monasteries nor did they see one another until just before their death. A fierce persecution began and both of them were brought before the tribunal. When the pagans mercilessly whipped Galaction, Episteme wept. Then they whipped her. After that, they cut off their hands, their feet and then their heads. Their friend Eutolius took their bodies and honorably buried them. Eutolius had been a slave of Episteme's parents, and then a monk with Galaction. He also wrote the life of these wonderful martyrs of Christ who suffered and received their wreaths in heaven in the year 253.

2. THE HOLY APOSTLES PATROBAS, HERMES, LINUS, GAIUS AND PHILOLOGUS

They were of the Seventy. Patrobas was Bishop of Neapolis, Hermes of Philipopolis (**Romans 16:14**), Linus of Rome (**II Timothy 4:21**), Gaius of Ephesus (**Roman 16:23**), and Philologus of Synope (**Romans 16:15**). All of them fulfilled the Law of Christ with love and took up their abode in the Kingdom of Christ.

3. SAINT JONAH, ARCHBISHOP OF NOVGOROD

Jonah was born in Novgorod and was orphaned early. A certain God-fearing widow took him and educated him. Seeing him as a child, Michael, the fool-for-Christ of Klops said to him prophetically: "Ivanushka, study diligently, for you will become archbishop in Novgorod the Great." And indeed, following the death of Archbishop Euthymius, Jonah was chosen and consecrated in his place. Jonah was devout and merciful to a rare degree for a mortal man. He built churches and monasteries and cared for his flock as a true good shepherd. He was offered the throne of Moscow as Metropolitan but declined, excusing himself because of his age. He entered into rest peacefully on November 5, 1570, and settled in the joyful heavenly habitations. One hundred years following his death there was a great fire in Novgorod. The relics of this saint did not burn in the furious flames, but on the contrary, from then on manifested healing power and emitted a wonderful fragrance.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE MARTYRS GALACTION AND EPISTEME

Galaction, and Episteme with him,
Abandoned the world of passing smoke,
Crucified the passions of the body,
And ascended to heaven in spirit.
Their hearts remembered Christ with every beat,
And were crucified with love for Him.
Then the tormentors arrived.
Galaction went to his torture,
And Episteme hurried after:
"Slower, Brother," she said, "do not hurry!
I was baptized by your hand,
Now take me with you to torture!
Even though I am unworthy, Brother,
I am willing to die for my Christ."
Galaction, and Episteme with him,
Proclaimed Christ to the unbelievers,
And in bitter tortures they breathed their last.
They gave their souls to Christ:
Now they live with angels in Paradise-
Galaction and Episteme.

REFLECTION

Physical love, in comparison to spiritual love, is less than a shadow is to solid substance. Brotherhood and sisterhood of the blood and body is nothing compared to the brotherhood and sisterhood of the spirit. Galaction's father betrothed him to the maiden Episteme. Galaction baptized Episteme and, after that, both received the monastic tonsure. Their physical love was replaced by spiritual love, a love as strong as death. So great was Galaction's spiritual love for Episteme that he never desired to see her with his physical eyes. Neither physical contact nor closeness are necessary for spiritual love. So great was Episteme's spiritual love for Galaction that when she heard that he had been taken for torture she ran after him, begging him not to reject her, but to receive her as a fellow sufferer, as he was her spiritual father and brother. When the merciless torturers flogged holy Galaction's naked body, holy Episteme wept. However, when the torturers cut off their hands and feet for Christ, both rejoiced and glorified God. So great was the power of their love for our Lord Jesus Christ, and so great was the spiritual love with which they loved each other. Truly, physical love is like a colorful butterfly that quickly passes, but spiritual love is enduring.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous action of the Holy Spirit upon the baptized (**Acts 19**):

1. How Paul, coming to Ephesus, saw men baptized with the baptism of John to repentance;
2. How he placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit descended upon them;
3. How they were filled with power, and spoke in tongues and prophesied.

HOMILY

-on the elevation of man through the Risen Christ-

... Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come and hath put all things under His feet (Ephesians 1:21-22).

Behold, the heights to which God exalts the being of man! Here, Christ's Divine Nature is not the subject, but rather His human nature. This is not about the eternal Word of God, but rather about the man Jesus, whom God raised from the dead and exalted-not only above this whole visible and mortal world, but also above the invisible and immortal, far above all the orders of angels and the heavenly powers; far above all the known and unknown wondrous hierarchies of heaven; far above every created being, known and unknown; and far above every name in the material and the spiritual worlds. My brethren, do you see how our All-glorious Creator fulfilled the promise He gave to Adam when he banished him from Paradise, and repeated more clearly to Abraham, and repeated still more clearly through the prophets and David? Do you see how the Lord of Sabaoth began to glorify the human race by glorifying the man Jesus, the Son of God, in Whom was incarnate the divinity of God? As the first in glory, God first glorified Him, and then, in order, all those who are numbered with Him, and who by the grace of the Holy Spirit are named and written in the Book of Life for eternal glory. It is not without cause that the Church sings to the Mother of God: "More honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." Where the Risen Lord is exalted, His Most-holy Mother is also exalted, as are also His holy apostles, in accordance with His words to His heavenly Father: **Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am (John 17:24).** Such is the boundless consequence of God's descent to earth. Such are the ineffable fruits of His sufferings.

O Lord Jesus Christ our Savior, equal only to Thy Father and the Holy Spirit; help us to extricate ourselves from the depth of putrid sin and sensual foolishness before the end.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 6 -

1. SAINT PAUL THE CONFESSOR, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

When Blessed Patriarch Alexander lay on his deathbed, the sorrowing faithful asked him who he would have follow him as the chief shepherd of the spiritual flock of Christ. He said: "If you desire a shepherd who will teach you and who will shine with virtues, choose Paul; but if you only want a suitable man, externally adorned, choose Macedonius." The people chose Paul. Unfortunately, this was not accepted by the Arian heretics, nor was it accepted by Emperor Constantius, who was then in Antioch. Paul was soon deposed, and fled to Rome with St. Athanasius the Great. In Rome, Pope Julian and Emperor Constans received them warmly and upheld them in their Orthodox Faith. Emperor Constans and Pope Julian saw to it that Paul was returned to his throne, but when Emperor Constans died the Arians raised their heads again, and Patriarch Paul was banished to Cucusus in Armenia. Once, as Paul was celebrating the Divine Liturgy in exile, he was attacked by the Arians and strangled with his omophorion, in the year 351. In 381, during the reign of Emperor Theodosius, Paul's relics were transferred to Constantinople, and in the year 1236 they were translated to Venice, where they still repose. His beloved priests and notaries, Marcian and Martyrius (October 25), suffered soon after their patriarch.

2. THE VENERABLE BARLAAM OF KHUTYN, THE MIRACLE-WORKER

Barlaam was born and raised as a Christian in Novgorod the Great. After the death of his parents, he was tonsured a monk and devoted himself to a life of strict asceticism. He founded a monastery on the bank of the Volkhov River, at a place where a heavenly light appeared to him. Barlaam was a great miracle-worker both during his life and after his death: he saw into the secrets of men's hearts, expelled unclean spirits and healed all sicknesses. After his repose, a servant of Prince Vasili Vasilievich became gravely ill and begged to be taken to the saint's grave. He further instructed them that, if he should die on the way, they should carry his dead body to the saint. And thus it happened-he died on the way and they carried him dead to the monastery, where he returned to life, stood up and prostrated before the grave of the saint. In the year 1471, Tsar Ivan the Terrible ordered that the saint's grave be dug up. As soon as they began to dig, a flame sprang from the grave and flared up along the walls of the church. The Tsar was so frightened that he ran out of the church and, in his haste, forgot his staff, which is still preserved beside the grave of the saint. The commemoration of this miracle is celebrated on the Friday after the Sunday of All Saints.

3. COMMEMORATION OF THE FALLING OF ASH FROM THE SKY

This took place in Constantinople in the year 472 during the reign of Emperor Leo the Great and Patriarch Gennadius. (See "Reflection" below.)

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE LORD'S MERCY AND GOODNESS

Our Lord is mercy and true goodness,
Yet He allows man to suffer for his sin:
Floods, sickness, earthquakes, droughts,
Horror and pains for body and soul.
He who does not see the Father when He offers gifts
Will see Him at the Judgment as the Righteous Judge.
The awesome Judge has many servants,
And employs them all for man's salvation-
The earth's thorns; serpents and beasts;
And floods, lightning, thunder from the sky;
And evil winds of illness; the sun, heat and darkness;
And the field, which gives either wheat or empty straw.
As many gifts await the faithful,
So many scourges are woven for the evil.
Adam's fields are watered with gentle dew,
But Sodom and Gomorrah are mowed with a flaming sword.
Above other created things, God loves man:
Therefore He forgives much; therefore He waits long.
But, when God's patience exceeds all bounds,
Then fire, not dew, does the work.

REFLECTION

If God can bring forth water from a rock as a comfort to men, He is also able to send down fire from the heavens as a punishment. The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah is a classic example of God's punishment upon incorrigible sinners. That God can repeat this punishment was demonstrated over Constantinople in the year 472, during the time of Emperor Leo the Great and Patriarch Gennadius. At noon on November 6 of that year, the sky became overcast with thick, dark clouds, causing darkness on the land. These clouds turned red as fire, then became dark, and alternated their appearance continuously. This phenomenon over Constantinople lasted for a full forty days. The frightened people turned to repentance and prayer. With the emperor and patriarch, they walked in procession through the streets from church to church and prayed to God with tears and lamentation. On the final day hot black ash fell like rain from evening until midnight, then stopped. The following day dawned clear and bright, but the sooty ash lay on the ground to a depth of nine inches. With great effort, the people cleaned their houses and streets of this sooty ash, but the crops in the field were utterly destroyed. All who had understanding, understood that this was God's punishment, and that it was God's gentle punishment because the people hastened to repent before Him. Had it not been for this profound repentance for their great and accumulated sins, who knows what would have happened to Constantinople in those days? But the timely repentance of sinners, and the prayers of the Most-holy Theotokos, as well as the prayers of the countless saints and martyrs of Constantinople, greatly lessened the punishment.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous power of healing that proceeded from the Apostle Paul (**Acts 19**):

1. How the people took his aprons and handkerchiefs and placed them on the sick;
2. How all the sick were healed, and evil spirits fled from them;
3. How the words of the Savior came true, that he who believes in Him will perform greater miracles than He.

HOMILY

-on the Head of the Church and the Body of Christ-

And gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Headless humanity is given a head in the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead. The body separated from the head is grafted to its head, part by part, member by member. Not all men are the body-only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. All are called, but only those who respond are received under the Head. The ones who respond comprise the Body that is called the Church, whose Head is the Lord. But, as the risen and glorified man, Jesus is exalted within the Holy Trinity, above all and everything on earth and in heaven, so also will His Church, His Body, be exalted to its Head, above all and everything. The whole Church, together with its Head, will stand at the right hand of the Holy Trinity-for where the head is, there also is the body. The redeemed and repentant sinners, the erstwhile adversaries of God-wandering astray like the Prodigal Son and headless as a dead body, but now adopted through Christ and for Christ, and clothed in the beauty of divine life and splendor-will be exalted to such heights, greatness and glory. For it is a great thing, brethren: the Incarnation of the Son of God on earth, His suffering on the Cross and His death for our sake. His visit to earth brought about a great change in the destiny of men, and in the meaning of all things. He changed all things and made all things new. Therefore, brethren, let us not live and conduct ourselves as the old man, but rather as the new man; let us not live according to sin, but according to righteousness; let us not act according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. May we be made worthy of those heights, of the greatness and glory to which we are called by our Head.

O Lord Jesus, the Holy Head of the Holy Church, make us worthy to be members forever of Thy Most-pure Body.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 7 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR HIERON AND HIS COMPANIONS

Hieron was born in Tyana in Cappadocia of a good and devout mother, Stratonika, who was blind. Hieron was a very zealous Christian and served his blind mother with great filial love. For two reasons he did not wish to join the army, and he resisted and drove off those who had been sent to take him. Hieron was loath to leave his helpless mother, and it was grievous for him even to consider that, as a soldier, he would be compelled to offer sacrifices to idols. Finally, Hieron was arrested along with other Christians, and they were all taken before the eparch of the town of Melitene. While they were still on the road, a man clad in a brilliant white garment appeared to Hieron one night and said: "Behold, Hieron, I proclaim salvation to you: you shall not wage war for an earthly king, but for the Heavenly King you will complete your struggle, and you shall soon come to Him to receive honor and glory." At this, Hieron's heart was filled with inexpressible joy. In Melitene they were all thrown into prison and Hieron, with great zeal, strengthened all the prisoners in the Faith, urging that not even one of them fall away, but that all willingly offer their bodies to torture and death for Christ. All but one confessed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The exception was Hieron's kinsman Victor, who fell away from the Faith. The tormentors cut one of Hieron's hands off, then flogged and tortured him in various ways until they beheaded him and the others. Going to the place of execution, these thirty-three martyrs chanted the Psalm: **Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord (Psalms 118:1)**. Here we will name the honorable martyrs whose names are written with his in the Book of Life: Hesychius, Nicander, Athanasius, Mamas, Barachius, Callinicus, Theogenes, Nikon, Longinus, Theodore, Valerius, Xanthius, Theodulus, Callimachus, Eugenius, Theodochus, Ostrichius, Epiphanius, Maximian, Ducitius, Claudian, Theophilus, Gigantius, Dorotheus, Theodotus, Castrichius, Anicletus, Themilius, Eutychius, Hilarion, Diodotus and Amonitus. A man named Chrysanthus purchased Hieron's severed head and honorably buried it, later building a church over it in the saint's name. The martyr's severed hand was brought to his blind mother. St. Hieron, with his companions, suffered in the year 298 and entered the glory of Christ.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR THESSALONICA WITH AUCTUS AND TAURION

This maiden was the daughter of a pagan priest, Cleon, a rich and arrogant man. Because of her faith in Christ, her father drove her from the house and city. Two honorable citizens, Auctus and Taurion, reproached Cleon for his inhuman treatment of his daughter, and he in turn denounced them as Christians. They were bitterly tortured and beheaded for Christ. Thessalonica was then tortured and slain as well. They suffered in the Macedonian city of Amphipolis near present day Kavala. Thus, these martyrs were made worthy of the Immortal Kingdom by their honorable suffering.

3. THE VENERABLE LAZARUS OF GALESIIUS

A pillar of light appeared above the house where he was born. Lazarus left his village of Magnesia and went to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage to the holy places. There, he was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified. After ten years, he settled on Mount Galesius and lived a life of asceticism on a pillar as a stylite. Lazarus was a miracle-worker both during his life and after death. Emperor Constantine Monomachus had great respect for him. Attaining old age, St. Lazarus entered into eternity toward the end of the eleventh century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR HIERON AND HIS COMPANIONS

Prisons are peculiar palaces!
In prison, St. Hieron spoke:
"O my brethren, thirty companions,
Hold to God's word,
To God's word and His law.
Behold, from time immemorial, the serpent has risen up,
Seeking to ensnare you with a glance,
So that, one by one, you would follow it to hell.
Do not succumb, brethren, true believers,
Oh, hearken to humble Hieron!
Whatever the serpent promises you
Is as fleeting as the green grass.
Courageously endure your sufferings:
Do not trade the eternal for the temporal;
Today or tomorrow, death will arrive,
Then all must go to the judgment of God.
Blessed is he who is not ashamed
When he sees his Judge before him.
Even more so is he who can show the Judge
The blood he has shed for Him,
And the wounds he bears for His name.
Such a one will reign eternally with Him."

REFLECTION

There are decisive moments in life upon which a man's eternal life or eternal death depend. We do not know when this decisive moment will come for us-perhaps today-and because of this we must be unceasingly vigilant. Victor, a kinsman of St. Hieron, was arrested with him. On the day before their torture, Victor, in terror of the impending tortures, went to the prison warden and begged him to take his name off the list of the condemned and release him, promising to give him his land. The warden removed his name and released him. However, upon returning home, Victor died of natural causes in the same moment that St. Hieron and his companions died in torments for Christ. Thus Victor vainly missed the decisive moment: he lost his land, his friends and both his earthly and heavenly life. In that same decisive moment, Hieron gained all. No one vied for Victor's body, while many vied for Hieron's body. When Christians sought the head of Hieron from the eparch, he asked as much gold for it as it weighed. Chrysanthus, a wealthy and devout man, paid that much gold for the martyr's honorable head. Anthony and Matronian hid one of St. Hieron's severed hands and brought it to Hieron's mother, the blind Stratonika. She took her son's hand and wept bitterly: "O my beloved son, I gave birth to you whole, and now I have only one part of you!"

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the malignant power of an evil spirit over those who serve him (**Acts 19**):

1. How seven Jews tried to imitate Paul in driving out spirits from possessed people, attempting this for their own gain;
2. How the evil spirit answered them, **Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?**
3. How the man with the evil spirit leaped on them and overwhelmed them.

HOMILY

-on the dark paths of mankind before and apart from Christ-

... in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2).

This is all one and the same path-the path to destruction. **According to the course of this world** means inclination toward sinfulness; according to the prince of the power of the air means according to the will of those chiefs of the demons who inhabit the air; **in the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience** means that in the same way that the opponents and adversaries of God now live, all men lived before the advent of Christ, including those to whom the Apostle writes the epistle. What is this **power of the air**, brethren? This is the order of evil spirits who exist in constant movement in the air. They make the air lethal and they impede the souls of the departed as they make their way to heaven. They deceive the spirit of man to work every evil; they tempt it with every sin. Yet, they do not command the spirit to sin, for they lack the power to do that; they can only tempt and corrupt. They acted more strongly and directly on the pagans than on the Israelites. They fell upon the pagans as a swarm of flies on a carcass, but the Israelites they watched from a distance, corrupting and tempting them more subtly. They stood at a distance from Israel because of the name of God, which was preserved and spoken among the Israelites. The Lord Jesus Christ scattered them all and plucked out their poisonous stings, so that they remained only as empty phantoms, as miserable, inconstant shadows that vanish instantly at the mention of the name of Christ or at the tracing of the sign of Christ's Cross.

O Lord Jesus, our Commander and Deliverer, help us to live in Thy freedom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 8 -

1. THE HOLY ARCHANGEL MICHAEL AND ALL THE BODILESS POWERS OF HEAVEN

The angels of God were celebrated by men from earliest times but this celebration was often turned into the divinization of angels (**II Kings 23:5**). The heretics wove all sorts of fables concerning the angels. Some of them looked upon angels as gods; others, although they did not consider them gods, called them the creators of the whole visible world. The local Council of Laodicea (four or five years before the First Ecumenical Council) rejected the worship of angels as gods and established the proper veneration of angels in its Thirty-fifth Canon. In the fourth century, during the time of Sylvester, Pope of Rome, and Alexander, Patriarch of Alexandria, the present Feast of Archangel Michael and all the other heavenly powers was instituted for celebration in the month of November. Why precisely in November? Because November is the ninth month after March, and March is considered to be the month in which the world was created. Also, as the ninth month after March, November was chosen for the nine orders of angels who were created first. St. Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of the Apostle Paul (who was taken up into the third heaven), described these nine orders of angels in his book, **On the Celestial Hierarchies**, as follows: six-winged Seraphim, many-eyed Cherubim, God-bearing Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Virtues, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. The leader of all the angelic hosts is the Archangel Michael. When Satan, Lucifer, fell away from God and drew a part of the angels with him to destruction, then Michael stood up and cried out before the faithful angels: "Let us attend! Let us stand aright! Let us stand with fear!" and all of the faithful angelic heavenly hosts cried out: "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!" Concerning the Archangel Michael, see **Joshua 5:13-15** and **Jude 1:9**. Among the angels there reign perfect oneness of mind, oneness of soul, and love. The lower orders also show complete obedience to the higher orders, and all of them together to the holy will of God. Every nation has its guardian angel, as does every Christian. We must always remember that whatever we do, in open or in secret, we do in the presence of our guardian angel. On the day of the Dread Judgment, the multitude of the hosts of the holy angels of heaven will gather around the throne of Christ, and the deeds, words, and thoughts of every man will be revealed before all. May God have mercy on us and save us by the prayers of the Archangel Michael and all the bodiless heavenly powers. Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY ARCHANGEL MICHAEL AND ALL THE BODILESS POWERS OF HEAVEN

Heavenly Commanders,
Who watch over us with great care,
Cover us with your wings,
And shield us with your power.

Armed with the power of God,
Crowned by His glory,
You wield flaming swords,
To cut the demons down.

Swift, swift as rays of light
You soar on the clouds-
The clouds of the air-
Where you do battle for God.

Without fatigue and without sleep
You hover ceaselessly
Over men and created things,
And over countless worlds.

Behold, yours are mighty armies,
Legions virtuous,
And gentle battalions of angels:
And, according to the Creator, our brothers.

Commanders of the might of heaven,
Lead us where we need to go-
To the throne of the Most High
Who created us from nothing.

REFLECTION

Holy Scripture clearly and irrefutably witnesses that angels ceaselessly communicate with this world. The Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church teaches us the names of the seven leaders of the angelic powers: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Salathiel, Jegudiel, and Barachiel (an eighth, Jeremiel, is sometimes included).

“Michael” in the Hebrew language means “Who is like unto God?” or “Who is equal to God?” St. Michael has been depicted from earliest Christian times as a commander, who holds in his right hand a spear with which he attacks Lucifer, Satan, and in his left hand a green palm branch. At the top of the spear there is a linen ribbon with a red cross. The Archangel Michael is especially considered to be the Guardian of the Orthodox Faith and a fighter against heresies.

“Gabriel” means “Man of God” or “Might of God.” He is the herald of the mysteries of God, especially the Incarnation of God and all other mysteries related to it. He is depicted as follows: In his right hand, he holds a lantern with a lighted taper inside, and in his left hand, a mirror of green jasper. The mirror signifies the wisdom of God as a hidden mystery.

“Raphael” means “God’s healing” or “God the Healer.” (**Tobit 3:17, 12:15**). Raphael is depicted leading Tobit (who is carrying a fish caught in the Tigris) with his right hand, and holding a physician’s alabaster jar in his left hand.

“Uriel” means “Fire of God,” or “Light of God” (**III Esdras 3:1, 5:20**). He is depicted holding a sword against the Persians in his right hand, and a fiery flame in his left.

“Salathiel” means “Intercessor of God” (**III Esdras 5:16**). He is depicted with his face and eyes lowered, holding his hands on his bosom in prayer.

“Jegudiel” means “Glorifier of God.” He is depicted bearing a golden wreath in his right hand and a triple-thonged whip in his left hand.

“Barachiel” means “Blessing of God.” He is depicted holding a white rose in his hand against his breast.

“Jeremiel” means “God’s exaltation.” He is venerated as an inspirer and awakener of exalted thoughts that raise a man toward God (**III Ezra 4:36**).

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Apostle Paul’s miraculous resurrecting of Eutychus (**Acts 20**):

1. How Paul preached in a house at Troas by night;
2. How the young man Eutychus drifted into a deep sleep, and fell from a third-story window to his death;
3. How Paul came down, embraced him and restored him to life.

HOMILY

-on how Christ brings to life men who are dead in sin-

Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ (Ephesians 2:5).

God first brought Christ to life: He first raised Him as a man from the grave. And Christ is our Head. Thus, in order to resurrect the whole generation of the faithful, it was necessary to resurrect the Head first. When the Head resurrected, then the resurrection of the whole body, with all its members, was assured. Therefore, the Apostle Paul speaks of our resurrection and glorification as a completed thing. So it is that God resurrected us also with Christ: **And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).** God resurrected us-together with Christ as man-who once were dead in sins, slain by our sins. He not only makes us worthy of resurrection with the Lord Jesus Christ, but He also puts us on the same level with the resurrected Christ in the heights of heaven, above the whole realm of incorporeal spirits. Brethren, God did not come to earth for the sake of some petty, inconsequential thing, but for something completely unique, something greater than great. When an earthly king visits a place in his country, the benefit of his visit is felt long after. The Lord, the King, visited mankind on the earth and the benefit of that visit will be felt to the end of time. That visit means life instead of death for us, glory instead of shame, closeness to God instead of estrangement, and blessing instead of a curse. In other words, that visit means our resurrection from the dead, and our eternal reign in the heavens with Christ.

O Lord, thanks be to Thee; O Lord, glory be to Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 9 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS ONESIPHORUS AND PORPHYRIUS

These two wonderful men were martyred for the name of Christ during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. They were severely beaten, then burned on an iron grid, then tied to horses' tails and dragged over rocks and thorns. They were thus torn to pieces and gave up their holy souls to God. Their relics are buried in Pentapolis.

2. THE VENERABLE JOHN THE DWARF [KOLOBOS]

John is numbered among the greatest of the Egyptian ascetics. ``Kolobos" means ``dwarf," for he was of little stature. He came to Scetis with his brother Daniel and, with the greatest zeal, devoted himself to such asceticism that Daniel had to urge him to moderation. John was a disciple of St. Pambo, and was later the teacher of St. Arsenius the Great. His fellow disciple under St. Pambo was St. Paisius the Great. Once, when he and Paisius were discussing what kind of asceticism to undertake, an angel of God appeared to them and commanded John to stay where he was and instruct others, and Paisius to enter the wilderness and live as a hermit. In order to test John's obedience, St. Pambo ordered him to water a dry stick planted in the ground until it turned green. Without hesitation or doubt, John watered this stick daily for three whole years until by the power of God, it grew green sprouts and brought forth fruit. Pambo then gathered the fruit from this tree, brought it to church and distributed it among the brethren saying: ``Draw near and taste of the fruit of obedience!" John the Dwarf had many disciples. Some of his wise sayings have been preserved. He entered into rest peacefully and took up his habitation in the joy of his Lord.

3. THE VENERABLE MATRONA OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Matrona was from Perga in Pamphylia. Matrona's marriage to Dometian, a nobleman of Constantinople, soon became unbearable to her. Disguised in men's clothing, she fled and adopted the name Babylas, then entered the Monastery of St. Bassian in Constantinople. Because her husband searched for her constantly, she was forced to move repeatedly. Altogether, she moved to Emesa, Sinai, Jerusalem and Beirut, and finally returned to Constantinople. Matrona was tonsured a nun at age twenty-five, and lived the ascetic life for seventy-five years. In all she lived a hundred years, and died peacefully in the year 492 as abbess of a monastery in Constantinople, taking up her abode in the joy of her Lord.

4. THE VENERABLE EUTHYMIUS OF DOCHIARIOU AND HIS DISCIPLE NEOPHYTUS

Euthymius and Neophytus were Serbs by birth and kinsmen of high-ranking aristocrats in Byzantium. Euthymius was a companion of St. Athanasius and the steward of his Lavra, after which he founded the Monastery of Dochiariou. He entered peacefully into rest in the year 990. His nephew Neophytus succeeded him as abbot of Dochiariou, increased the brotherhood and built a large church. He entered into rest at the beginning of the eleventh century.

5. SAINT SIMEON METAPHRASTES [THE TRANSLATOR]

Simeon was a gifted Constantinopolitan. He had both a secular and spiritual education. He attained the rank of imperial logothete [chancellor] and was first among the nobles at the imperial court, yet he lived a pure and blameless life as a true ascetic. He distinguished himself by great military bravery and statesmanly wisdom. For these qualities, Emperor Leo the Wise greatly respected him and sent him to Crete to negotiate a peace with the Arabs who then occupied the island. Successfully completing his mission, he returned to Constantinople and soon thereafter withdrew from the world and worldly affairs. He wrote many lives of saints, compiling 122 new biographies and correcting 539 biographies. He entered into rest in about the year 960, and a fragrant and healing myrrh flowed from his relics.

6. THE VENERABLE THEOCTISTA OF PAROS

Theoctista was born on the island of Lesbos and was tonsured a nun at the age of seventeen. The savage Saracens attacked the island and enslaved all who fell into their hands, including Theoctista and her sister. When the Saracens brought the slaves to the marketplace on the island of Paros, Theoctista escaped from the crowd and hid in an abandoned church in the middle of the island, where she lived a life of asceticism for thirty-five years. She entered into rest in the year 881.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SIMEON METAPHRASTES

St. Simeon was called Metaphrastes-
He dedicated his God-given talent to the Church.
He loved the saints, the friends of God,
And wondrously described their struggles:
Struggles in spirit, struggles in the flesh,
Struggles in thought, and struggles in deeds.
He was a true friend to the friends of God,
Who are dearest to God of all the men in the world.
He loved those whom God loves,
And through them he deepened his love for God.
Simeon shone with love for God,
And wrote his Lives like a brilliant tapestry,
For new generations in the four corners of the world,
To nourish their souls with true spiritual integrity,
By having vivid examples of saintly nobility,
By which to follow in the footsteps of patristic teachings.
Wondrous is our God in His saints;
Wondrous is the Lord, the Creator of angels.

REFLECTION

After a long separation from his companion Paisius, John the Dwarf visited him. Each asked the other what virtue he had attained in the time they were apart. Paisius said: ``The sun has never seen me eat." John the Dwarf said: ``And it has never seen me angry." Instructing the brethren in Scetis, John used this story of a repentant human soul: ``In one town there lived a beautiful woman, a harlot who had many lovers. A certain prince told her that he would take her as his wife if she promised that she would live honorably and faithfully in marriage. She promised this and the prince took her to his court and married her. However, her former lovers decided to turn her back to her former ways, and reclaim her for themselves. They dared not face the prince, so they went around the back of the palace and began to whistle. The woman heard the whistling, recognized it, and quickly stopped her ears. She hid in an inner chamber of the palace and locked the door behind her. Thus, she was delivered from new temptations." St. John explained this story in the following manner: ``The harlot is the soul; her lovers are the passions; the prince is Christ; the inner chamber is the heavenly habitation; and the lovers who whistle and entice are the demons. If the soul would constantly turn from its passions and flee to God, then the passions and the demons would be frightened and flee from it."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the appearance to Paul of an angel in a tempest at night (**Acts 27**):

1. How an angel of God appeared to Paul by night and told him to fear not, for he would be saved, and all those with him;
2. How Paul related this to the men on the boat, greatly encouraging them.

HOMILY

-on saving grace-

By grace ye are saved (Ephesians 2:5, 8).

Who can comprehend and acknowledge that we are saved by grace-that we are saved by God's grace, and not by our merits and works? Who can comprehend and acknowledge that? Only he who has comprehended and seen the bottomless pit of death and corruption in which man is engulfed by sin, and has also comprehended and seen the height of honor and glory to which man is raised in the Heavenly Kingdom, in the realm of immortality, in the house of the Living God-only such a one can comprehend and acknowledge that we are saved by grace. A child was traveling by night. He stumbled and fell into hole after hole and pit after pit, until he finally fell into a very deep pit from which he could in no way escape by his own power. When the child gave himself over to the hands of fate and thought his end was near, there was suddenly someone standing over the pit, lowering a rope to him and telling him to grab the rope and hold firmly to it. This was the king's son, who then took the child home, bathed him, clothed him and brought him to his court and set him beside himself. Was this child saved by his own deed? By no means. All he did was to grab the end of the rope, and hold on. By what, then, was the child saved? By the mercy of the king's son. In God's relationship with men, this mercy is called grace. **By grace ye are saved.** The Apostle Paul repeats these words twice in a short span, that the faithful might recognize and remember them.

Brethren, let us comprehend and remember that we are saved through grace by the Lord Jesus Christ. We were in the jaws of death, but have been given life in the courts of our God.

O Lord Jesus Christ our Savior, by Thee are we saved.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 10 -

1. THE HOLY APOSTLES OLYMPAS, ERASTUS, QUARTUS, HERODION, SOSIPATER AND TERTIUS

They were all among the Seventy. The latter three are also commemorated elsewhere: Herodion on April 8, Sosipater on April 28, and Tertius on October 30. Saints Olympas and Herodion were followers of the Apostle Peter and when Peter suffered, they also suffered. By the command of Nero, they were beheaded. Erastus had been the steward of the church in Jerusalem, and later became Bishop of Paneas in Palestine. Quartus was Bishop of Beirut. He suffered greatly, but converted many to the Christian Faith. Sosipater was a bishop in Iconium and Tertius was the second bishop in that city. They waged spiritual warfare and, as victors, received heavenly wreaths of glory.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR ORESTES

Orestes was from the town of Tyana in Cappadocia. He was a Christian from birth and a physician by profession. He was harshly tortured by a certain wicked eparch Maximus during the reign of Diocletian. When the eparch at first advised him to deny Christ and worship idols, Orestes replied: "If you knew the power of the Crucified One, you would reject idolatrous falsehoods and worship the true God." For this, he was savagely beaten, scraped, pulled apart on the rack, burned with a red-hot iron, and cast into prison to die of starvation. The young Orestes spent seven days without bread or water. On the eighth day, he was again brought before the eparch who threatened him with frightening tortures. Orestes answered: "I am prepared to endure every pain, having the sign of my Lord Jesus Christ inscribed on my heart." The governor condemned him, and the torturers hammered twenty iron nails into his feet and tied him to a horse, dragging him over thorns and rocks until the martyr of God breathed his last. On the place where they discarded Orestes's body, a man bright as the sun appeared, gathered Orestes's relics, and carried them to a hill near the town of Tyana, honorably burying them there. This wonderful saint appeared to St. Dimitri of Rostov after his repose, and showed him all the wounds on his body.

3. SAINT NONNUS, BISHOP OF HELIOPOLIS

Nonnus was renowned as a great ascetic in the Tabennisiot monastery in Egypt. Because of this, he was chosen Bishop of the diocese of Edessa in 448. Later, he was translated to the diocese of Heliopolis, and there converted 30,000 Arabs to the Christian Faith. After the death of Bishop Ibo, St. Nonnus returned to Edessa, where he remained until his repose in 471. Through his prayers, the infamous sinner Pelagia (who was later glorified for her holiness of life), was converted to the Christian Faith (see October 8).

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR ORESTES

The young Orestes did not spare his youth,
But boasted of Christ before the judge,
The Living God, One and Holy,
Crucified on the Cross for mankind.
They flogged St. Orestes's back,
As he mocked the lifeless idols;
And they burned wondrous Orestes in the fire,
Which was cooled by the dew of God's Spirit.
They drove nails into his feet,
And covered his whole body with wounds.
Strengthened by the Spirit, Orestes prayed,
And gave thanks to God
That he was made worthy of such sufferings,
That God had adopted him as a son.
O Orestes, the God-pleaser,
Courageous martyr for Christ,
Help us unto the last day-
By your prayers, come to our aid-
That we may honorably end our lives,
And be made worthy of Paradise with you.

REFLECTION

The all-wondrous ways of God's providence were shown in an exceptional and wondrous event in the Monastery of Dochiariou, in the time of the Blessed Neophytus, nephew of St. Euthymius. When, after Euthymius's repose, Neophytus began to build a new, larger church to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, his resources ran out and he prayed to God for help, and God helped him in a miraculous manner. A peninsula called Longos or Sika lay near the Monastery of Dochiariou. On this peninsula, Neophytus had a small metochion, close to which was a stone statue of a man, bearing the following inscription: "He who strikes me on the head will find much gold." Many had struck the statue on the head, but had found nothing. It happened that Neophytus sent Basil, a novice of the monastery, on an errand. One day this Basil stood by the statue and wondered at the mysterious inscription. Just then the sun came out and cast the statue's shadow toward the west. Basil struck the head of the shadow with a stone, dug there, and found a kettle full of gold coins. He immediately ran to tell Abbot Neophytus. The abbot ordered three honorable monks to go with Basil in the monastery's boat and bring back the gold. These monks set off, loaded the gold into the boat and began the return trip. While they were on the sea, the devil tempted them to take the gold for themselves. Then those three honorable monks, deluded by the devil, bound Basil with a rope, tied a rock around his neck and threw him into the sea. As Basil fell to the bottom of the sea, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel suddenly appeared to him as two resplendent youths, took him and brought him to the church at Dochiariou, placing him before the Royal Doors in the locked church. The next day, when the monks entered the church, they found Basil lying bound before the sanctuary. The abbot questioned him and was told of the miraculous event. Then the three other monks arrived and, seeing Basil alive, were thunderstruck. The abbot punished them severely, took the gold and completed the church. However, he dedicated it to the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel, and not to St. Nicholas, as he had earlier planned. That is why Euthymius's old church at Dochiariou is called the Church of St. Nicholas, and the new one is called the Church of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Paul's wondrous salvation from the snake (**Acts 28**):

1. How Paul gathered sticks and put them on the fire;
2. How a venomous viper leaped from the fire and fastened on his hand;
3. How he shook the viper off, and no harm came to him.

HOMILY

-on the only Peace and the Peacemaker-

For He is our peace, Who hath made both one (Ephesians 2:14).

Between the Israelites and the pagans there lay a wide abyss that no mortal could bridge, or fill in and level off. The Lord Jesus Christ alone was the one who could do that, and He did it. That which had been estranged, He brought closer and joined. By what? By His Blood. By His sacrifice, He replaced all other sacrifices. By this, He redeemed all of nature and by Himself replaced that which men brought and offered to God (or, to the gods) as sacrifice. One sacrifice is sufficient both for the Israelites and for the pagans: the sacrifice of Christ. Furthermore, the blood of animals separated the Israelites and the pagans-by the places where they were offered, by the divinity to whom they were offered, by the kind of animal that was offered and the manner in which it was offered. Now, Christ's Most-pure Blood has come in place of all that blood, and His Blood unites and makes brothers of the Israelites and the pagans. They became blood brothers, even as all of us faithful are blood-brothers-because of the Blood of Christ, by which we are redeemed from the curse, and by which we are now fed. He destroyed **the middle wall of partition (Ephesians 2:14)** that divided and separated, and He joined the hands and the hearts of the Israelites and the pagans. By what? By His Body. That is, by the living truth, by the truth incarnate in Himself. The shadow of the Law had replaced truth for the Israelites, and fables had replaced truth for the pagans. He removed both of them and revealed the living truth in His Body, and the world saw and rejoiced.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our most blessed Redeemer, unite the hearts of us, Thy faithful.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR MENAS

Menas was an Egyptian by birth and a soldier by profession. As a true Christian, he was not able to witness the abominable sacrificial offerings to the idols and left the army, the town, the people and everything else, and went to a deserted mountain, for it was easier for him to live among the wild beasts than with pagans. One day Menas clairvoyantly discerned a pagan celebration in the town of Cotyaeus. He descended into the town and openly declared his faith in Christ the Living God. He denounced idolatry and paganism as falsehood and darkness. Pyrrhus, eparch of that town, asked Menas who he was and where he was from. The saint replied: ``My fatherland is Egypt, my name is Menas. I was an officer, but witnessing the worship of idols, I renounced your honors. I now come before you all to proclaim my Christ as the true God, that He may proclaim me as His servant in the Heavenly Kingdom." Hearing this, Pyrrhus subjected St. Menas to severe tortures. They flogged him, scraped him with iron claws, burned him with torches, and tortured him by various other means, and finally beheaded him with the sword. They threw his body into a fire so that Christians would not be able to retrieve it, but Christians recovered several parts of his body from the fire nevertheless. They reverently buried those remains, which were later transferred to Alexandria and buried there, where a church was built over them. St. Menas suffered in about the year 304 and went to the Kingdom of Christ. He was and remains a great miracle-worker, both on earth and in heaven. Whoever glorifies St. Menas and invokes his help with faith, receives his help. The saint has often appeared as a warrior on horseback, arriving to help the faithful or punish the unfaithful.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR STEFAN OF DECHANI, KING OF SERBIA

Stefan was the son of King Milutin and father of Tsar Dushan. By the command of his ill-informed father, Stefan was blinded, and at the command of his capricious son (Dushan), was strangled in his old age. When he was blinded, St. Nicholas appeared to him in the church at Ovche Polje (Field of the Sheep) and showed him his eyes saying: ``Stefan, be not afraid: behold your eyes in my palm. In due time, I will return them to you." Stefan spent five years in Constantinople as a prisoner in the Monastery of the Pantocrator. By his wisdom and asceticism, his meekness and piety, his patience and benevolence, Stefan not only surpassed all the monks in his monastery, but all monks in Constantinople. When five years had passed, St. Nicholas again appeared to him and said: ``I came to fulfill my promise." He then traced the sign of the Cross on the blind king, and Stefan received his sight. In thanksgiving to God, Stefan built the Church of Dechani, one of the most marvelous works of Byzantine artistic beauty, and one of the most famous monuments of Serbian piety. The holy King Stefan, with St. Sava and the holy Prince Lazar, constitute a most glorious trinity of holiness, nobility and self-sacrifice-the gift of the Serbian people. St. Stefan lived his earthly life as a martyr, and died as a martyr in the year 1336, receiving the wreath of immortal glory from the Almighty God Whom he had faithfully served.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS VICTOR AND STEPHANIDA

Victor was a soldier of Roman birth. He was tortured for Christ during the reign of Emperor Antoninus. At the time of his torture a young woman, Stephanida, declared that she too was a Christian. Victor was beheaded and Stephanida was pulled apart by having her legs bound to the tops of two palm trees.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR VINCENT THE DEACON

Vincent was from the diocese of Saragossa in Spain. He was cruelly tortured for the Lord Jesus Christ, then burned on an iron grid. He gave up his soul to God in the year 304. His body reposes in Rome in the church bearing his name.

5. THE VENERABLE THEODORE THE STUDITE

Theodore was the famous abbot of the Studite monastery (the Studium). He suffered greatly for the holy icons, and was a wise organizer of the monastic life, a divinely inspired teacher of Orthodoxy and a wonderful ascetic. He entered into rest in Constantinople, in the year 826 at the age of sixty-eight.

6. SAINT UROSHICA, PRINCE OF SERBIA

Uroshica was the son of King Dragutin. He preserved his purity and chastity in marriage. Myrrh flowed from his grave.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR STEFAN OF DECHANI, KING OF SERBIA

Tortured and persecuted, Holy King Stefan of Dechani
Endured pains and persecutions as a true Christian.
And when it seemed he was defeated by all,
He was actually victorious, powerful and unscathed.
He defeated his father by patient endurance,
And Cantacuzene by profound wisdom.
With silence he overcame malicious Simonida,
And with trust in God he overcame King Shishman.
He was even more powerful than his mighty son-
For those who do not sin are always more powerful.
Earthly power always ends without a glimmer,
But there is no end to heavenly power.
King Stefan of Dechani, meek and beloved,
Drew his strength from heavenly power:
His power and glory were from Christ,
And from Christ was his life, throne and sovereignty.
Stefan understood this, and this he confessed;
That is why he defeated all adversaries in the end.
Pray for us, O wondrous king,
That God may grant us salvation and mercy.

REFLECTION

If ever there was a holy king who sat on the throne of an earthly kingdom, that was the holy King Stefan of Dechani. The Greeks, who otherwise considered the Slavs barbarians, were amazed at the beauty of St. Stefan's soul as one of the rarest wonders of the time. When the Emperor Cantacuzene sent the abbot of the Monastery of the Pantocrator to Milutin on some official business, King Milutin inquired about his son Stefan. ``O King, are you asking me about the second Job?" the abbot replied. ``Be assured that his poverty stands above your royal greatness." For his part, the Byzantine emperor acted very cruelly toward the blind Stefan: he confined him to one area of the court and forbade everyone access to him. After that, he sent him to the Monastery of the Pantocrator, hoping that the monastery would force him into strict monastic asceticism, and that he would become weak and perish there. But God preserved the Blessed Stefan and he endured the ascetic labor of fasting and prayer like the best of monks. They began to speak of his wisdom throughout all of Constantinople, and the emperor began to respect him and often sought advice from him. For example, St. Stefan contributed to the defeat of the infamous heresy of Barlaam, against which St. Gregory of Palamas fought. Barlaam then resided in Constantinople, and by skillful intrigue, had won over many high-ranking clerics and civil officials to his way of thinking. In perplexity, the emperor summoned Stefan and asked him what he should do. The wise Stefan replied with the words of the Psalmist: **Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? (Psalm 139:21)**, and also said: ``Dangerous men must be banished from society." Heeding this, Emperor Cantacuzene drove Barlaam from the capital with dishonor.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wonderful healing power of the Apostle Paul (**Acts 28**):

1. How Paul prayed and laid his hand on Publius's father and healed him of dysentery;
2. How he also healed many others in that place in the same manner.

HOMILY

-on the Creator of the new man-

... for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Ephesians 2:15).

When He came to earth, the Lord, the Lover of Mankind, came to all men, not just to some. The Jews awaited a messiah; He came as the Messiah. The pagans awaited a redeemer; He came as the Redeemer. He came with equal love for both the Jews and the pagans. There was no other group on earth-only the Jews and the pagans. The Jews were the only ones in the world who believed in one God, whereas the pagans worshiped idols. But the Jews had obscured their faith by their transgressions and, therefore, knew nothing. Thus, both the Jews and the pagans had become equal in their ignorance and equal in the curse of sin with which Adam had burdened the benighted earth. As of old Adam did not belong to the Jews exclusively, but also to the pagans, for they both descended from him, so Christ, the new Adam, did not belong to one or the other, but to both, for He saved both. The Lord Jesus could not side with the Jewish kingdom of empty legal formalism, or the Hellenic kingdom (including paganism in general) of naturalistic fables and demonic divinations and sorcery. Rather, He healed them both. He took both of these sick ones and he created the new man. And this is the Church of God. Thus, the Lord annulled and cast out both Judaism and Hellenism, and created His Holy Church.

O Lord Jesus, All-good and All-wise, everything Thou hast done is good and wise beyond words.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. ST. JOHN THE MERCIFUL, PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA

John was born on the island of Cyprus. His father was Prince Epiphanius. John was raised as a true Christian from childhood. At the insistence of his parents, he married and had children. However, by God's providence, his wife and children passed from this world into the next. Renowned for his compassion and piety, John was chosen as Patriarch of Alexandria in the time of Emperor Heraclius. He governed the Church of Alexandria for ten years as a true shepherd, safeguarding it from pagans and heretics. He was a model of meekness, charity and love for his fellow men. He said: "If you desire nobility, seek it not in blood but in virtues, for this is true nobility." All the saints have been distinguished by mercifulness, but St. John was completely dedicated to this wonderful virtue. Once, while celebrating the Liturgy, the patriarch remembered the words of Christ, **Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matthew 5:23-24)**, and he remembered that one of the clergy in that church had a grievance against him. He quickly left the Holy Gifts, approached that priest, fell before his feet and begged for forgiveness. And only when he had made peace with this man did he return to the table of oblation. Another time, as he was on his way to the Church of Saints Cyrus and John, it happened that he met a needy and unfortunate widow who spoke to him at length about her misfortune. The patriarch's escorts became bored by the woman's lengthy complaint, and urged the bishop to hurry to the church for the service, intimating that he could hear the woman's story afterward. John said to them: "And how will God listen to me, if I do not listen to her?" He would not leave until he heard the widow's complaint to the end.

When the Persians attacked Egypt, Patriarch John boarded a boat to escape from danger. Along the way he fell ill and, when he arrived in Cyprus, he reposed at his birthplace, in the year 620. After he entered the Immortal Kingdom of his Lord, his miracle-working relics were translated to Constantinople, then to Budapest, and finally to Presburg.

2. THE HOLY PROPHET AHIJAH OF SHILOH

Ahijah prophesied a thousand years before Christ. He prophesied to Jeroboam, Solomon's servant, that he would reign over ten of the tribes of Israel (**1 Kings 11:29-31**).

3. THE VENERABLE NILUS OF SINAI

Nilus was at first a prefect in the capital city, Constantinople. As a married man, he had a son and a daughter. Seeing the sinful life of the capital, he agreed with his wife to withdraw from the world. This they did. His wife and daughter went to a convent in Egypt. Nilus and his son Theodulus went to Mount Sinai. Nilus lived a life of asceticism on Mount Sinai for a full sixty years. He wrote wonderful books on the spiritual life. He entered peacefully into rest in about the year 450, in the eightieth year of his earthly existence, and took up his habitation in the blessed heavenly life. These holy words are his: "Physical passions have their origin in physical desires, and against them abstinence is necessary; but spiritual passions are born of spiritual desires, and against them, prayer is necessary."

4. THE VENERABLE NILUS THE MYRRH-GUSHER

Nilus was born in the Morea. As a hieromonk he went with his uncle to the Holy Mountain and there lived a life of asceticism as a recluse in a deserted place called "the Holy Rocks." When he entered into rest, myrrh flowed from his body in such abundance that it ran down from the top of the mountain into the sea. This miracle-working myrrh attracted ailing men from all over. A disciple of St. Nilus was so distracted by the many visitors that he complained in prayer to St. Nilus, and the flow of myrrh ceased at once. St. Nilus lived a life of asceticism in the fullest sense, like the saints of old. He entered into rest in the seventeenth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE NILUS OF SINAI

St. Nilus of Sinai spoke to the monks:
"Repeat the name of Jesus in your heart!
Exercise your heart in innocence,
And your body in purity and abstinence.
If you are insulted, endure the insult,
And thus the insulter will feel the injury.
Weep for the sinner, even when he advances:
He is on an eternal journey to meet justice.
If you endure misfortunes, they will serve you-
Misfortunes are thorns on which roses grow.
Whenever you pray to God, ask not for pleasant things,
But for that which brings benefit to the soul!
Fear not death, but await the death of the body;
Feel shame before the angels, before you feel the shame of men.
Avoid temptation and do not seek it,
But when it comes of its own accord, show yourself a hero.
He who often partakes of Communion with the gracious Christ
Is a temple in which Christ abides.
Speak little and rarely with men,
But speak more and more often with God."
Thus, did Nilus of Sinai teach the monks,
And his deeds bore witness to his words.

REFLECTION

Their time of death and the necessity of preparation for it was revealed beforehand to many holy men and women. This is a great gift from heaven, but as we do not expect this gift, we unworthy ones need daily repentance to prepare for our departure. One can flee from men, but never from God. When St. John the Merciful fled Egypt from the Persians, a gloriously radiant man with a golden sceptre in his hand appeared to him on the boat and said: "The King of kings is calling you to Himself." John understood these words and began to prepare for his repose, which came soon. The holy King Stefan of Dechani's beloved St. Nicholas often appeared to him, and did so before Stefan's repose, saying: "Stefan, prepare for your departure, for soon you will appear before the Lord." Both saints were very similar in their compassion. Despite the immeasurable wealth that St. John had at his disposal as Patriarch of Alexandria, he personally had only one-third of a dinar at his repose, and he willed even that to the poor. When St. Stefan of Dechani was in the Monastery of the Pantocrator in Constantinople, a generous Serbian nobleman secretly sent him a substantial sum of money. "I give thanks to the good gentleman for his love," replied Stefan to the bearer, "but he would give me greater joy if he would distribute this money, intended for me, to the poor."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the courage of the Apostle Paul (**Acts 28**):

1. How he sat in chains for two years in Rome;
2. How he freely preached the Gospel to the pagans and Jews, not fearing anyone;
3. How neither chains nor prison nor death could turn him away from preaching the Gospel.

HOMILY

-on how strangers become members of the household-

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, it seemed that only the Jews were close to God and that the pagans were farther away from God. But as a matter of fact, the Jews and the pagans were equally estranged from God, and from true reverence for Him. Then He came, Christ the Savior, **and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh (Ephesians 2:17)** and by that, brought both Jews and pagans **by one Spirit unto the Father (Ephesians 2:18)**. In the new creation, or the new man, or the Church of God, the Spirit is one; and everyone who enters the Church of God receives this Spirit, so that no matter how much the Church increases in members, there always remains the one Spirit of God; and no matter how many nations or tribes or races enter the Church of God, the Spirit does not change, but remains forever and ever, one and the same Spirit. That is why pagans are not **strangers and foreigners** in the Church, but are **fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God**, as are all other members of the Church. For the Church is founded on holiness, and her cornerstone is the Saint above saints, and according to the plan, all of her members should be holy. All those who lived before Christ but expected Christ and hoped in Him, as well as those who lived after Christ, and who recognized Christ as Lord, Son of God, Savior, Redeemer, Resurrector and Judge, are also called saints. Sin separates and alienates from God, but through the Lord Jesus Christ, division and alienation have vanished, and all the faithful-whether former Jews or pagans-became members of the household of God, by and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

O my brethren, the Lord Jesus Christ gave us something greater and more precious than this life: He gave us peace and friendship with God, and this is greater and more precious than life in alienation from God.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of Peace and Giver of Peace, sustain us to the end in peace with God.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 13 -

1. SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

John was born in Antioch in the year 354. His father, Secundus, was an imperial commander and his mother's name was Anthusa. Studying Greek philosophy, John became disgusted with Hellenic paganism and adopted the Christian Faith as the one and all-embracing truth. Meletius, Patriarch of Antioch, baptized John, and his parents also subsequently received baptism. Following his parents' repose, John was tonsured a monk and lived a strict life of asceticism. He then wrote a book, **On the Priesthood**, after which the Holy Apostles John and Peter appeared to him, and prophesied that he would have a life of great service, great grace and great suffering. When he was to be ordained a priest, an angel of God appeared simultaneously to John and to Patriarch Flavian (Meletius's successor). While the patriarch was ordaining John, a shining white dove was seen hovering over John's head. Glorified for his wisdom, asceticism and power of words, John was chosen as Patriarch of Constantinople at the behest of Emperor Arcadius. As patriarch, he governed the Church for six years with unequalled zeal and wisdom. He sent missionaries to the pagan Celts and Scythians and eradicated simony in the Church, deposing many bishops guilty of this vice. He extended the charitable works of the Church and wrote a special order of the Divine Liturgy. He shamed the heretics, denounced Empress Eudoxia, interpreted Holy Scripture with his golden mind and tongue, and bequeathed the Church many precious books of his homilies. The people glorified him, the envious loathed him, and the Empress, on two occasions, sent him into exile. John spent three years in exile, and reposed as an exile on the Feast of the Elevation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross, September 14, 407, in the town of Comana in Georgia. Before his repose, the Holy Apostles John and Peter appeared to him again, as did the Holy Martyr Basiliscus (May 22) in whose church he received Communion for the last time. His last words were, "Glory be to God for all things," and with that, the soul of the golden-mouthed patriarch was taken into Paradise. Chrysostom's head reposes in the Church of the Dormition in Moscow, and his body reposes in the Vatican in Rome.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ANTONINUS, NICEPHORUS, GERMANUS AND MANETHA

The first three were watching the pagans worshipping idols with shouts and dancing at one of their feasts. Fearlessly, they went before the crowd and preached the One God in Trinity. Firmilian-the eparch of Palestinian Caesarea, where this occurred-was so enraged at the action of these three Christians that he commanded their immediate beheading. Manetha was a Christian maiden who followed the martyrs as they were being led to the place of execution. She too was arrested, and after cruel tortures, was burned to death. They all suffered in the year 308 and entered into the eternal joy of the Eternal God.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR DAMASCENE

Damascene was born in Galata in Constantinople and at first was called Diamantis. In his youth he lived immorally, and even became a Moslem. Then bitter repentance ensued, and he went to the Holy Mountain, where he lived a life of strict asceticism for twelve years, as a monk in the Lavra of St. Athanasius. But, desiring martyrdom to expiate his sins, Damascene went to Constantinople and visited the mosques, making the sign of the Cross and shouting that the Turks' faith was false and that Jesus Christ is God and Lord. He was beheaded before the gate of the Phanar on November 13, 1681. His relics repose on Halki, in the Monastery of the Holy Trinity.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

The Church glorifies St. John
The "Golden-mouth," blessed by God,
Christ's great soldier,
Who is the adornment and boast of the Church:
Profound of heart and mind,
And a golden-stringed harp of words.
He plumbed the depths of mysteries,
And found the pearl that shines as the stars.
Exalted in mind to heaven's height,
He expounded divine truth;
And his vision is true throughout history.
He gave all to the Son of God.
He revealed to us the horrors of sin,
And the virtues that adorn a man;
He showed us the most precious mysteries,
And all the sweet richness of Paradise.
Evangelist, interpreter of the Gospel
And bearer of spiritual joy,
Zealous for Christ like an apostle,
He would accept no injustice.
He was tormented like any martyr,
And received his torment as a pledge of salvation.
This servant of Christ showed himself true;
Therefore, the Church glorifies Chrysostom.

REFLECTION

Punishment and reward! Both of these are in the hands of God. But, as this earthly life is only a shadow of the true life in the heavens, so punishment and reward here on earth are only a shadow of true punishment and reward in eternity. The principle persecutors of the saint of God Chrysostom were Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria and Empress Eudoxia. After Chrysostom's martyric death, bitter punishment befell them both. Theophilus went mad, and Eudoxia was banished from the imperial court by Emperor Arcadius. Eudoxia soon became ill with an incurable disease-wounds opened up all over her body, and worms came out of her wounds. Such was the stench that she gave off, that it was not easy for a person on the street to pass by her house. Physicians used all the most powerful perfumes and incense if only to overcome the stench from the wicked empress, but had little success. The empress finally died in corruption and agony. Even after death, the hand of God lay heavy on her. The coffin containing her body shook day and night for a full thirty-four years until Emperor Theodosius translated the relics of St. John Chrysostom to Constantinople. But what happened to Chrysostom after his repose? Reward-such reward as only God can give. Adeltius, the Arabian bishop who received the exiled Chrysostom into his home in Cucusus, prayed to God after Chrysostom's repose that He reveal to him where John's soul was to be found. Adeltius then had a vision while at prayer. It was as though he were out of himself, and was led through the heavens by a radiant youth who showed him the hierarchs, pastors and teachers of the Church in order, calling each of them by name-but he did not see John. Then that angel of God led him to the passage out of Paradise, and Adeltius was downcast. When the angel asked him why he was sad, Adeltius replied that he was sorry that he had not seen his beloved teacher, John Chrysostom. The angel replied: ``No man who is still in the flesh can see him, for he is at God's throne with the Cherubim and Seraphim."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 1**):

1. How, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth;
2. How the earth was without form and void;
3. How the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

HOMILY

-on the foundation and the cornerstone-

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Ephesians 2:20).

Brethren, the foundation of the apostles and prophets is their life and work: the Old and the New Testaments. Who unites the apostles and the prophets? Christ the Lord. Without Him, the prophets would not understand the apostles, nor would the apostles understand the prophets. Therefore, He is the fulfillment of the prophets and witness of the apostles. Thus, He is the Cornerstone that ties the prophets and the apostles together, as a cornerstone holds the walls together. The Old and New Testaments are united in Him, have their meaning in Him, revolve around Him, were inspired by Him and are upheld by Him, the Lord Jesus Christ. Where would the pagans and Jews meet, and where would they understand one another, if not in Jesus Christ the Lord? Nowhere, except in Him. In Him and through Him they are united in one new man, in one immortal body, in One, Holy and Catholic Church. Only through the Lord Jesus Christ are the body and the soul united in a loftier and holier friendship. The bonds between the soul and body were at enmity until His coming in the flesh, and that enmity led to the destruction of the soul. He reconciled and sanctified them both. Thus, He became the Cornerstone of every immortal and God-pleasing edifice-be that edifice an individual man or family or nation or the entire race of man-either in the present, in the past, or in the future; of the Old Covenant or the New Covenant. He is the Chief Cornerstone in every building, as He is the Head of the Body, God's Church.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our Cornerstone of salvation, have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE PHILIP

Philip was born in Bethsaida beside the Sea of Galilee, as were Peter and Andrew. Instructed in Holy Scripture from his youth, Philip immediately responded to the call of the Lord Jesus and followed Him (**John 1:43**). After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Philip zealously preached the Gospel throughout many regions in Asia and Greece. In Greece, the Jews wanted to kill him, but the Lord saved him by His mighty miracles. Thus, a Jewish high priest that rushed at Philip to beat him was suddenly blinded and turned completely black. Then there was a great earthquake, and the earth opened up and swallowed Philip's wicked persecutor. Many other miracles were manifested, especially the healing of the sick, by which many pagans believed in Christ. In the Phrygian town of Hierapolis, St. Philip found himself in common evangelical work with his sister Mariamna, St. John the Theologian, and the Apostle Bartholomew. In this town there was a dangerous snake that the pagans diligently fed and worshiped as a god. God's apostle killed the snake through prayer as though with a spear, but he also incurred the wrath of the unenlightened people. The wicked pagans seized Philip and crucified him upside-down on a tree, and then crucified Bartholomew as well. At that, the earth opened up and swallowed the judge and many other pagans with him. In great fear, the people rushed to rescue the crucified apostles, but only Bartholomew was still alive; Philip had already breathed his last. Bartholomew ordained Stachys as bishop for those whom he and Philip had baptized. Stachys had been blind for forty years, and Bartholomew and Philip had healed and baptized him. The relics of St. Philip were later translated to Rome. This wonderful apostle suffered in the year 86 in the time of Emperor Domitian.

2. SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS, ARCHBISHOP OF THESSALONICA

Gregory's father was an eminent official at the court of Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus. The gifted Gregory, completing his secular studies, did not want to enter the service of the imperial court, but withdrew to the Holy Mountain and was tonsured a monk. He lived a life of asceticism in the Monastery of Vatopedi and the Great Lavra. He led the struggle against the heretic Barlaam and finally defeated him. He was consecrated as Metropolitan of Thessalonica in the year 1347. He is glorified as an ascetic, a theologian, a hierarch and a miracle-worker. The Most-holy Theotokos, St. John the Theologian, St. Demetrius, St. Anthony the Great, St. John Chrysostom and angels of God appeared to him at different times. He governed the Church in Thessalonica for thirteen years, of which he spent one year in slavery under the Saracens in Asia. He entered peacefully into rest in the year 1360, and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ. His relics repose in Thessalonica, where a beautiful church is dedicated to him.

3. SAINT JUSTINIAN, EMPEROR OF BYZANTIUM

Justinian was a Slav by birth, probably a Serb from the region of Skoplje. His Slavic name was Upravda, meaning "truth, justice." He succeeded to the throne of his uncle Justin in 527. The greatness of this emperor is inseparably bound to his profound faith in Orthodoxy; he believed, and lived according to his faith. During Great Lent, he neither ate bread nor drank wine but ate only vegetables and drank water, and that, just every other day. He waged war against the barbarians of the Danube because they castrated their captives. This reveals his elevated feeling of love for his fellow man. Justinian was fortunate and successful both in wars and in his works. He built many great and beautiful churches, the most beautiful of which was Hagia Sophia [the Church of the Divine Wisdom] in Constantinople. He collected [and revised] and published the Laws of Rome and also personally issued many strict laws against immorality and licentiousness. He composed the Church hymn "Only-begotten Son and Word of God," which has been sung during the Divine Liturgy since the year 536. He convened the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553). He died peacefully at the age of eighty, and took up his abode in the Kingdom of the Heavenly King.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JUSTINIAN, EMPEROR OF BYZANTIUM

**Justinian, great and glorious,
Knight of the Cross and Orthodox emperor,
Raised a church to the Wisdom of God,
A church to endure to the threshold of eternity:
Another sun to shine on earth,
To warm the generations;
A church in which to worship the Incarnate Word,
And in which to come to know the beauty of Christ,
And the measureless height of the Kingdom of God,
And as in height, measureless depth,
And as in depth, measureless width,
And as in width, measureless length.
Like the sun on a summer's day,
Shone the crown of Emperor Justinian-
Shone the crown of the servant of God-
In his wisdom, the wisest,
In his might, the most powerful,
And in his faith, the most faithful.
O great Orthodox Emperor,
Your churches never grow old,
Your faith still shines upon the world
With the brilliance of the Orthodox Christ.
O holy Emperor, pray to Christ
That this Faith withstand time.**

REFLECTION

St. Gregory Palamas learned much through heavenly revelations. After he had spent three years in stillness in a cell of the Great Lavra, it was necessary for him to go out among men and benefit them with his accumulated knowledge and experience. God revealed this necessity to him through an extraordinary vision: One day, as though in a light sleep, Gregory saw himself holding a vessel in his hand full to overflowing with milk. Gradually, the milk turned into wine which likewise spilled over the rim, and drenched his hands and garments. Then a radiant youth appeared and said: "Why would you not give others of this wonderful drink that you are wasting so carelessly, or are you not aware that this is the gift of God's grace?" To this Gregory replied: "But if there is no one in our time who feels the need for such a drink, to whom shall I give it?" Then the youth said: "Whether there are some or whether there are none thirsty for such a drink, you are obligated to fulfill your debt and not neglect the gift of God." Gregory interpreted the milk as the common knowledge (of the masses) of moral life and conduct, and the wine as dogmatic teaching.

The second time Gregory secluded himself in a monastery he was writing his **Principles of Orthodoxy**. On the eve of the Feast of St. Anthony the Great, the monks summoned him to the all-night vigil service, but he remained at his work in the cell while all the brethren went to church. St. Anthony suddenly appeared to him and said: "Perfect stillness is good, but sometimes it is necessary to be with the brethren." Convinced by this revelation, Gregory immediately went into church to the joy of all the monks.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of light (**Genesis 1**):

1. How there was darkness everywhere over the formless earth;
2. How **God said, Let there be light: and there was light;**
3. How God separated the light from the darkness, and there was day and there was night.

HOMILY

-on Paul, the prisoner-

... I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1).

Brethren, this apostle of Christ calls himself the "prisoner of Christ." How is it that an apostle can be a prisoner? Is not a prisoner bound? Yes, and the Apostle is bound-bound by love to the Lord Jesus so strongly that he feels that no comparable bond exists on earth. The Apostle is bound in his mind to the Lord Jesus so strongly that he cannot think of anything except Jesus Christ the Lord. The Apostle is so firmly bound by his will to the Lord Jesus that, in essence, he does not have a will of his own but has submitted his will completely to the Lord Jesus. And so, he loves that which Christ loves, thinks that which Christ thinks, and does that which Christ wills. Is this not imprisonment? O blessed imprisonment, which is not unto shame but glory, and is not unto destruction but salvation! Thus, Christ is the complete Lord of the Apostle's life, both outwardly and inwardly. For outwardly and inwardly, Christ permits him to be tempted; outwardly and inwardly, He reveals to him the wonders of His providence; outwardly and inwardly, He guides him to perfect good for the sake of his salvation, and for the sake of the salvation of many others.

Brethren, let us also commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ as did His Apostle, and then we will be in the most secure hands and on the most secure path.

O Lord Jesus Christ, great and wonderful Lord, bind us to Thee, imprison us in Thee forever and ever in both worlds.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 15 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS GURIAS, SAMONAS AND ABIBUS

Gurias and Samonas were prominent citizens of Edessa. During one of the persecutions of Christians, they hid outside the city and lived in fasting and prayer, encouraging true believers who came to them for counsel. However, they were captured and brought before the judge, who threatened them with death if they did not submit to the imperial decree demanding idol worship. These holy martyrs of Christ answered him: "If we submit to the imperial decree, we will perish, even if you don't kill us." After cruel torture, they were thrown into prison, where they remained from August 1 to November 10, enduring hunger, darkness and pain. They were then led out and again tortured, but since they remained unwavering in the Christian Faith, they were condemned to death and beheaded in the year 322, during the reign of the wicked Emperor Licinius. Later Abibus, a deacon in Edessa, suffered tortures for Christ his Lord and gave his spirit to God while in the flames. His mother took his body, miraculously intact, from the fire and buried it in a grave with the relics of St. Gurias and St. Samonas. When the persecution ceased, Christians built a church in honor of the three martyrs, Gurias, Samonas and Abibus, and placed their miracle-working relics in a common reliquary. Of the numerous miracles of these wonderful saints of God, the following is especially outstanding: A widow in Edessa had a young daughter who was to marry a Gothic soldier serving in the Greek army. As the mother feared for her daughter's safety if she were to live far away, the Goth swore on the grave of the holy three martyrs that he would do no evil to the maiden, but would take her as his lawful wife, as he had already sworn that he was not already married. In reality, he did have a wife, and when he took the young maiden to his country he kept her, not as his wife but as a slave, until his lawful wife died. He then agreed with his kinsmen to bury his living slave with his dead wife. The girl tearfully prayed to the three holy martyrs to save her, and they appeared to her in the grave, and took her in an instant from the land of the Goths to Edessa, to their church. The following day when the church was opened, they found the young maiden by the tomb of the saints of God, and learned of her miraculous deliverance.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ELPIDIUS, MARCELLUS AND EUSTOCHIUS

They suffered for Christ at the time of Julian the Apostate. Elpidius was a senator. Witnessing the torture and miracles of Elpidius, six thousand pagans came to believe in Christ the Lord.

3. THE FEAST OF THE ICON OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS OF KUPYATICH

This icon first appeared to a maiden named Anna in the village of Kupyatich, in the province of Minsk, in the year 1182. Tending her flock, Anna saw a light in the forest. When she approached this light she beheld a medium-size cross on a tree, bearing the image of the Most-holy Theotokos. Anna brought this cross home, then returned to her flock. However, to her great amazement, she saw the same cross on the tree in the same place. She took it, placed it in her bosom and brought it home. When she tried to show her father the cross, she reached into her bosom, but the cross was not there. She related everything to her father and went out with him, saw the cross in the forest, and took it home. The next day, the cross was not in the house. They alerted the whole village, and all the villagers went and beheld the cross and venerated it. The people soon built a church there, and numerous miracles were manifested by this cross bearing the image of the Theotokos. This icon is now to be found in the Church of Holy Wisdom in Kiev.

HYMN OF PRAISE

TO THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS

**O Most-holy Mother of God, Bride of God,
Thou wast the Bodily Throne of Christ God,
Thou didst bear the King of Glory in thy body,
Thou gavest birth to Him Who gavest life to a dead world.
By His Blood, His holy Blood, He redeemed the world,
Gloriously glorifying Himself and thee, O Virgin.
But thy true glory shines in heaven,
Where thou sittest on the right hand of Christ Himself.
And the rays of thy glory descend to earth,
And shine at night on the path of the sojourners.
Glory to thee, Mother of God, throughout the ages,
The first Temple, the wonderful Temple of the glory of Christ!**

REFLECTION

God most often gives victory in battle to the peacemakers. One example of this is the great Emperor Justinian, and another example is the holy King Stefan of Dechani. Following the death of his father King Milutin, Stefan removed the bandage from his eyes and was joyfully proclaimed as king both by the nobles and by the people. However, Constantine-son of Simonida and Stefan's younger brother on his father's side-raised up an army against Stefan. Stefan then wrote him in the following manner: "You have heard what has happened to me (that is, how I received my sight) by God's providence, that works in all for the good. Shown mercy by God, I have inherited the throne of my parents, to rule over the people in the fear of God and with justice, according to the example of my forefathers. Abandon your undertaking, and come, let us meet with one another; assume the second place in the kingdom as the second son, and do not rise up with foreigners against your fatherland. Our spacious land is sufficient for both you and me. I am not Cain, the slayer of his brother, but a friend of Joseph, the lover of his brethren. In the words of the latter, I say to you: **You intended evil against me but God intended it for good (Genesis 50:20).**" Thus wrote the holy king, but Constantine did not take heed and was defeated in battle by Stefan. Defeated also was Vladislav, Dragutin's son, another pretender to the Serbian throne. However, Michael Shishman, the Bulgarian king, fared worst of all. Stefan wrote to him: "Reflect on the meaning of Christian love, calm your wrath, let there be love between us as there was between our parents. Cease to shed Christian blood. Turn your weapons against the enemies of the name of Christ and not on Christians. Remind yourself of how hard it will be to answer for innocent blood. Know this also, that he who takes what belongs to others loses what is his." Michael scoffed at this letter from the holy king and was utterly defeated at Velbuzd in 1330. "God is with the righteous, not with the mighty."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 1**):

1. How God said: **Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters;**
2. How He divided the waters under the firmament from the waters above the firmament;
3. How He called the firmament heaven.

HOMILY

-on the revelation of the wisdom of God to the heavenly powers-

... To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10).

Brethren, are the angels all-knowing? They are not; for if they were all-knowing, they would be gods. God is one, brethren, and the angels are God's beautiful servants. The mystery of the Incarnation was not known to the angels before it took place. And all the other mysteries connected with the mystery of the Incarnation were also unknown to the angels until they saw them revealed in the Church. Therefore the Church is a new revelation, even for the holy angels. The Church is a new revelation of the wisdom and power of God and of His love for man. On the other hand, it is also a new revelation of man's love for God, and man's struggle. Even the angels themselves did not foresee how much God would humble Himself or how much man would be uplifted. This was shown in the Church, and through the Church it was proclaimed to the angels. The Apostle speaks of this to the Ephesians in the words quoted above: **the principalities and powers**-in other words, not even to the chiefs of the angels was everything known beforehand. **The manifold wisdom of God** is that wisdom that was not revealed earlier, and was unknown to the angels and now, in the Church, is shown in countless forms, situations and circumstances.

O my brethren, the two greatest works of God that have been revealed up to now are the creation of the world and the creation of the Church. In both works, brethren, man is the main object of God's love. Let us be thankful with our every breath to the Most-gracious God.

O Gracious God, O Compassionate God.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE MATTHEW THE EVANGELIST

Matthew, son of Alphaeus, was a tax collector when the Lord saw him in Capernaum and said: **Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him (Matthew 9:9).** After that, Matthew prepared a reception for the Lord in his home and thus provided the occasion for the Lord to express several great truths about His coming to earth. After receiving the Holy Spirit, Matthew preached the Gospel to the Parthians, Medes and Ethiopians. In Ethiopia he appointed his follower Plato as bishop, and withdrew to prayerful solitude on a mountain, where the Lord appeared to him. Matthew baptized the wife and the son of the prince of Ethiopia, at which the prince became greatly enraged and dispatched a guard to bring Matthew to him for trial. The soldiers returned to the prince saying that they had heard Matthew's voice, but could not see him with their eyes. The prince then sent a second guard. When this guard approached the apostle, he shone with a heavenly light so powerful that the soldiers could not look at him; filled with fear, they threw down their weapons and returned. The prince then went himself. Matthew radiated such light that the prince was instantly blinded. However, the holy apostle had a compassionate heart; he prayed to God, and the prince was given back his sight. Unfortunately, he saw only with physical eyes and not spiritual eyes. He arrested Matthew and subjected him to cruel tortures. Twice, a large fire was lighted on his chest, but the power of God preserved him alive and unharmed. Then the apostle prayed to God and gave up his spirit. The prince commanded that the martyr's body be placed in a lead coffin and thrown into the sea. The saint appeared to Bishop Plato and told him where the coffin bearing his body could be found. The bishop retrieved the coffin with Matthew's body from the sea. Witnessing this new miracle, the prince was baptized and received the name Matthew. After that, the prince left all the vanity of the world and became a presbyter and served the Church in a God-pleasing way. When Plato died, the Apostle Matthew appeared to the presbyter Matthew and counseled him to accept the episcopacy. He accepted the bishopric and, for many years, was a good shepherd until the Lord called him to His Immortal Kingdom. St. Matthew the Apostle wrote his Gospel in the Aramaic language. It was soon after translated into Greek and the Greek text has come down to us, while the Aramaic text has been lost. It is said of this evangelist that he never ate meat, but only vegetables and fruit.

2. THE VENERABLE SERGIUS OF MALOPINEGA

Sergius was a Russian parish priest who lived a God-pleasing life and served for sixty-two years in the province of Vologda. He peacefully entered into rest in the Lord on November 16, 1585, at the age of ninety-two.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE MATTHEW THE EVANGELIST

To His Holy Apostle Matthew,
The Lord appeared in the land of the blacks,
Giving great comfort to the tortured warrior,
And great strength to his heroic soul.
The Lord gave him a staff from His hand,
And told Matthew to plant it in front of the church.
He told him that it would grow green with life and blossom with various colors,
And bear sweet fruit for everyone to enjoy.
A spring would flow from beneath its roots-
A spring of cool water for those who thirst.
The face of whomever would partake of it with thanksgiving
Would shine with a wondrous light.
The apostle did as the Lord said,
And the wood budded forth, and was adorned with blossoms,
And living water flowed from its roots,
And the church was filled with a multitude of people.
Whoever was sick, was healed;
Whoever was healthy, became healthier still.
The blacks were blessed, their faces radiant,
And this fierce people became God's vineyard.
O wondrous tree, would that we could have it!
But we do have it, brethren; all of us have it!
It is Christ the Lord, the Lord of Hosts-
He is the Tree of Life; by Him we are saved.

REFLECTION

Does the Lord's command about ceaseless prayer **that men ought always to pray (Luke 18:1)**, apply only to monks or to all Christians in general? If it applied only to monks, the Apostle Paul would not have written to the Christians in Thessalonica to **pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17)**. The Apostle repeats the Lord's command, word for word, and issues it to all Christians without distinction, whether monks or laymen. St. Gregory Palamas lived a life of asceticism for some time as a young hieromonk in a monastery in Beroea. The elder Job, a well-known ascetic whom everyone respected, lived in that monastery. It happened that, in elder Job's presence, St. Gregory quoted the Apostle's words, asserting that ceaseless prayer is the obligation of every Christian and not just for monks. However, elder Job replied that ceaseless prayer is the obligation of the monk only, and not for every Christian. Gregory, as the younger of the two, yielded and withdrew in silence. When Job returned to his cell and stood at prayer, an angel in great heavenly glory appeared to him and said: "O Elder, do not doubt the truthfulness of Gregory's words; he spoke correctly and you should think likewise and pass it on to others." Thus, both the Apostle and the angel confirmed the commandment that all Christians must pray to God **without ceasing**. Not only **without ceasing** in church, but also **without ceasing** in every place and at all times, and especially in your heart. For if God does not for a moment tire of giving us good things, how can we tire of thanking Him for these good things? When He thinks of us **without ceasing**, why do we not think of Him **without ceasing**?

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the creation of the world (**Genesis 1**):

1. How on the third day God divided the dry land from the water;
2. How He commanded the earth to bring forth grass and fruit-bearing trees;
3. How this was according to the Word of God, and **it was good**.

HOMILY

-on Christ's dwelling in the hearts of the faithful-

**... that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;
that ye [may be] rooted and grounded in love
(Ephesians 3:17).**

With faith, Christ comes into the heart, and with Christ comes love. Thus man is rooted and grounded in love. First then, there is faith; then with faith comes Christ's presence in the heart; then with Christ's presence, the presence of love; and with love, all ineffable goodness. In a few words, the Apostle delineates the whole ladder of perfection. The beginning is faith and the end is love; and faith and love are joined in a living, undivided unity by the Living Lord Jesus Christ's presence in the heart. By strengthening faith, we further abolish the distance between ourselves and the Lord Jesus Christ. The stronger one's faith, the closer one is to Christ. Ultimately, one's heart is filled with Christ and cannot be separated from Christ, just as one's lung cannot be separated from the air. Then a man may, with tears of joy, communicate with Christ by the prayer of the heart--"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner"--and the heart is imperceptibly filled with light and ardent love. In this way, love is united with faith and hope; and when they are united, the boundaries between them are lost, so that man cannot even think of determining of how far faith goes, and where hope and love begin. When the living Christ dwells in a man, then he no longer perceives faith, hope or love in himself, nor does he name them. Instead, he sees only Christ and names only Him. This is just like a fruit-grower in autumn who considers the ripe fruit on the tree, and speaks no more of blossoms and leaves but of fruit, ripe fruit.

O Lord Jesus Christ, supreme height of all our endeavors and the destination of all our travels, draw near to us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER -17-

1. SAINT GREGORY THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF NEOCAESAREA

This man of God and powerful wonderworker was called a second Moses. Gregory was born of pagan, but eminent and wealthy, parents. He studied Hellenic and Egyptian philosophy and became aware of the meagerness and insufficiency of pagan philosophy. He then turned to Christian teachers, particularly Origen of Alexandria, with whom he studied for several years and from whom he received baptism. Pure in body and soul, he wanted to dedicate himself solely to Christ God, for which reason he withdrew to the wilderness, where he spent much time in rigorous asceticism. His fame spread everywhere. Bishop Phaedimus of Amasea wanted to consecrate him Bishop of Neocaesarea. The clairvoyant Gregory perceived Phaedimus's intention and hid from the bishop's emissaries in the wilderness. Finally, Phaedimus consecrated him in a strange way, and Gregory had to accept the office of bishop. The Most-holy Theotokos and St. John the Theologian appeared to him in a vision, and St. John, at the command of the Theotokos, gave him the Symbol of Faith that is known by Gregory's name. Who can enumerate all the miracles of this second Moses? He had power over evil spirits, and over mountains and waters, healed every pain and infirmity, could become invisible to his persecutors, and clairvoyantly perceived distant events and men's thoughts. He ended his earthly life in the year 270, in great old age. When he arrived in Neocaesarea as bishop, he found only seventeen Christians in that pagan city. When he departed this life, he left the city Christian, with only seventeen pagans, and received the wreath of glory from his Lord in the Heavenly Kingdom.

2. THE VENERABLE NIKON OF RADONEZH

Nikon was a disciple of St. Sergius of Radonezh, and his successor as abbot. When barbarians attacked Russia, Nikon prayed to God to remove this misfortune from the Russian people. Then St. Sergius appeared to him with St. Peter and St. Alexis (the reposed Metropolitans of Moscow) and told him not to grieve, for the assault was by God's permission and was for their good, but would pass and peace would reign once more. Nikon renovated the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and served as an example to many of asceticism. He entered into rest on November 17, 1426.

3. THE VENERABLE GENNADIUS OF VATOPEDI

Gennadius was a monk of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, and had the obedience of being steward. During his time as steward an empty barrel was miraculously filled with oil. This miracle is ascribed to the Most-holy Theotokos, to whom the monastery is dedicated, and especially to her icon, which was nearby.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT GREGORY THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF NEOCAESAREA

St. Gregory, holy and glorious,
A shining light of the Church and an Orthodox hero,
Raised himself up to God by a very narrow path:
Through suffering and tears, he attained holiness.
He saved himself, and helped many.
By his exemplary life, words and miracles,
He helped the unbelievers to belief,
And believers to be pure and true to the Faith.
The heavens were open to him,
And he clearly penetrated the secrets of men.
He received mystical teachings from heaven;
As the heart of that teaching, he taught the Holy Trinity-
The Divine Trinity, one in Essence,
And Christ, the life-giving food and drink.
Just as pure dewdrops are full of sunlight,
Pure hearts are the dwelling place of the heavens.
With God's help, holy Gregory
Overcame the moonless night of idolatry,
And baptized pagans by the thousands;
Then he departed in peace, to stand with his King!
Holy Gregory, implore God
That the Orthodox Church overcome the adversary!

REFLECTION

Let the following examples from the Life of St. Gregory show how God guards and saves the righteous from assaults. While he was still at the school of philosophy in Alexandria, St. Gregory preserved the purity of his soul and his body, as he preserved it to the end of his life. In this, he was an exception among the dissolute youth of that time. This evoked envy and hatred among his companions. In order to debase Gregory, they found a harlot to help them carry out an evil plan. Once, when Gregory was standing in the square with eminent teachers and philosophers, the foul woman approached him and loudly demanded that Gregory pay her the remainder due for impure relations with her. Some of the people present were scandalized, while others were angry at this shameless woman and began to chase her away; but she shouted even louder, demanding money. The innocent Gregory blushed, as any decent man would before such coarse slander, but he displayed neither anger nor hatred, and asked a friend to give her the amount that she sought so she would leave. The friend heeded Gregory, and gave her the money she wanted. But at that moment God let an evil spirit enter the woman and she fell to the ground and began writhing and convulsing, gnashing her teeth, and foaming at the mouth. Seeing this, everyone was terrified. But St. Gregory, innocent as a lamb, prayed to God for her, and the woman was healed and arose. Thus, instead of humiliation, Gregory acquired even greater glory.

Another example: When a bitter persecution of Christians took place, St. Gregory counseled Christians to hide, and he and his deacon hid on a hill. But the imperial soldiers caught sight of them and pursued them. When they were almost upon them, Gregory prayed to God for help, and God rendered them invisible to their pursuers. The soldiers searched for them in vain, and finally left without them.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the creation of the world (**Genesis 1**):

1. How God created the greater and lesser lights on the fourth day;
2. How He created the sun to shine during the day, and the moon and the stars to shine at night.

HOMILY

-on the breadth, length, depth and height-

That ye ... may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height (Ephesians 3:17-18).

Behold the fruits of faith and love! Behold the royal gifts that Christ the King confers when He dwells in a man's heart: the understanding of salvific mysteries and the understanding of all that is important to a man's life. This understanding is not personal or exceptional, and it is not individual or novel. It is in accordance with the understanding of the saints-for who are the saints, if not those that are rich in faith and love? They were given the understanding of the mysteries of God because of their faith and love. Therefore, test your understanding against their understanding, and if you see a difference, know that it is you who are not in the right. If, however, your understanding is in accordance with theirs, you have attained the measure of their faith and love, and that means that Christ dwells in your heart.

If that is so, then you will comprehend the breadth of God's love, by which He embraced both Jews and pagans in the plan of salvation, and the length of God's providence by which, from time immemorial, He prepared and developed the plan of salvation through the Law, the Prophets and many miracles. You will also comprehend the depth of the humility of Christ, by which He personally descended into hades to save the souls of the righteous, and the height of the glory of Christ, which He received as a man after the completion of His saving work on earth. Breadth and length and depth and height stand like Christ's Cross: embracing all, explaining all, inviting all, showing mercy to all, and exalting all.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our gracious Lord, have mercy on us and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR PLATO

Plato was from the town of Ancyra in Galatia. He was a Christian by birth and upbringing. While in his youth, he showed great perfection in every virtue. Plato did not conceal his faith in Christ the Lord, but preached it openly, denouncing idolaters because of their worshiping lifeless objects in place of the Living Creator. For this, he was brought to trial before Governor Agrippinus, and was interrogated and harshly tortured by him. When the governor counseled him to avoid death and save his life by worshiping the idols, Plato said: "There are two deaths, the one temporal and the other eternal; so also are there two lives, one of short duration and the other without end." Then Agrippinus subjected him to even harsher tortures. Among other tortures, red-hot cannon balls were set on the saint's naked body; then they cut strips from his skin. "Torture me more harshly," the martyr cried out to the torturers, "so that your inhumanity and my endurance may be seen more clearly." When the torturer reminded the martyr that his namesake, Plato the philosopher, was a pagan, the martyr replied: "I am not like Plato, nor is Plato like me except in name. I learn and teach the wisdom of Christ, but Plato was a teacher of wisdom that is foolishness to God." After that, Plato was thrown into prison, where he remained for eighteen days without food and water. When the guards were amazed that Plato was able to live in hunger for so long, he told them: "You are satisfied by meat, but I, by holy prayers. Wine gladdens you, but Christ the True Vine gladdens me." Plato was beheaded in about the year 266 and received his wreath of eternal glory.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS ROMANUS AND BARULAS

St. Romanus was a deacon of the church in Caesarea and zealously preached the Gospel in Antioch. One day, there was an idolatrous feast. The Eparch of Antioch, Asclypiades, went to enter a pagan temple to offer sacrifices, but Romanus stood in the way and said: "You sin, O Governor, when you go to the idols. The idols are not gods—Christ is the only true God." The enraged eparch subjected Romanus to tortures and had him flogged and scraped without mercy. During this, St. Romanus saw a child by the name of Barulas, and said to Asclypiades: "Even this small child has more understanding than you, old man, for he knows the true God and you do not." The eparch questioned Barulas about his faith, and he confessed Christ the Lord as the One True God, contrary to false idolatry. Asclypiades commanded that young Barulas be beheaded, and St. Romanus be strangled in prison. Thus, both of these martyrs inherited the Kingdom of Christ in the year 303.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS ROMANUS AND BARULAS

Barulas beheld the tortures of St. Romanus,
And Romanus beheld Barulas, sad and tear-stained.
Barulas had a child's innocent soul;
Barulas had a heart purer than a lily.
And the wicked eparch asked Barulas:
"Come, my child, without bribery, speak the truth:
Is Christ better, or our gods?"
"Christ is far better than your idols!"
"Had I known, O Child, I would not have asked you!
How is Christ better? Come, tell me."
"Christ is the Creator of the world,
Idols are fancies of the demon's kingdom."
The governor, now furious, beat the child.
But this was pleasant to the child, and he spoke louder:
"O people, abandon the cursed demons,
Christ alone is God; He enlightens men."
Barulas's mother stood by, and encouraged her son:
"Become worthy, O Son, of the rank of martyrdom."
As a lamb beneath the sword, Barulas bent his neck,
And glorified Christ, himself and his mother.

REFLECTION

But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matthew 5:39), commanded the Lord. This is the shortest and clearest teaching on humility. The evil demons fear nothing so much as a humble man fulfilling the Lord's commandments. There was a rich nobleman in Alexandria who had a young daughter into whom an evil spirit had entered, and the daughter had gone insane. Someone told the despairing father that none could heal his daughter except the monks who lived in the wilderness and came to Alexandria from time to time to sell baskets, their handiwork; but none of the monks would enter the rich nobleman's house if he told them why he was inviting them. It would be better for him to purchase baskets from the monks, then ask them to come to his house for payment. Then, when they entered the house, he could implore them to pray to God for all the members of the household, and thus obtain God's help to cure the maiden. The father obeyed and went to the marketplace on a certain day and met one of St. Macarius's disciples as he was selling baskets. The man agreed to buy the baskets, and invited the monk to his home to pay him. When the monk entered the home, the possessed daughter leaped at the monk and vigorously struck him on one cheek with her hand. The monk silently turned the other cheek. The evil spirit cried out in anguish and departed from the girl, and she became completely calm and rational. When the monk returned to the wilderness, he told the elders what had happened and they all glorified God, that He had given so much power to those who fulfill His commandments.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 1**):

1. How, on the fifth day, God created the living things that live in the waters and the fowls of the air;
2. How God blessed them and said: **Be fruitful and multiply.**

HOMILY

-on love that surpasses knowledge-

... to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge (Ephesians 3:19).

The love that surpasses knowledge, that exceeds our understanding, is the love of Christ. No one can have even an inkling of the quality or the greatness of this love until Christ enters into him. Can anyone who has never tasted honey have any idea of its taste? Only when Christ enters into the heart of man by faith, does man know the inexpressible taste of the love of Christ-its sweet and intoxicating fragrance and incomparable comprehensiveness. Just as a man who has Christ in his heart touches the breadth, length, depth and height of the knowledge of divine wisdom, so this man with Christ in his heart also touches the limitless open seas of the divine love of Christ. O my brethren, how feeble are words when one needs to speak of the love of Christ-words are never weaker than in this situation. Indeed, what can one say before such astounding proofs of His love? He created us out of love, He was incarnate out of love, and out of love He accepted mockery and death for our sake. He opened the heavens for us out of love, and He revealed to us the immortal glory prepared for us! Even all this is only a part of the inexhaustible wealth, glory, beauty and life-creating sustenance that is the love of Christ. Oh, if only we too would be made worthy by faith, so that the Lord Jesus would enter our hearts, and that we would taste of His ineffable love!

O Lord Jesus Christ, our Life, our Wisdom and our Love, cleanse us and enter into us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET OBADIAH

Obadiah was born in the village of Betharam in the region of Shechem. He lived at the court of King Ahab, but when the king turned away from true worship and bowed down to idols, Obadiah did not follow the king, but continued to serve the one, true God. When the evil Queen Jezebel, in her hatred of Elias, raised a persecution against all the prophets of God, Obadiah gathered a hundred of them, hid them in two caves, and fed them to the end of the persecution (**I Kings 18:4**). A contemporary of the great Prophet Elias, Obadiah revered him greatly and served him in all things, as his follower and disciple. He lived nine hundred years before Christ and entered peacefully into rest.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR BARLAAM

Barlaam was born in Antioch. Because of his faith in Christ the Lord, the impious judge tortured him harshly. Finally, the judge decided to mock him by forcing him to offer sacrifice to the idols. For this he took him to the pagan temple and set a burning coal on his palm and incense on the coal. The judge thought that the pain would cause the martyr to shake the coal and incense off his hand before the idols, and thus involuntarily cense them. However, the soldier of Christ heroically held the burning coal on his palm with no thought of casting it before the idols, until his fingers were burned through and fell off and his palm was completely burnt. St. Basil the Great said: "He had a right hand more powerful than fire: although the coal burned his hand, his hand still held the fire as if it were ash." Chrysostom writes: "The angels looked from the heights. The archangels beheld-the scene was majestic, in truth transcending human nature. Behold, who would not wish to see a man who made such an ascetic endeavor, yet did not feel that which is characteristic of men to feel; a man who was himself both the altar of oblation and the sacrifice and the priest?" When his hand burned off, elder Barlaam's whole body fell to the ground dead and his soul went to the eternal rest of our Lord the Savior. This glorious, heroic elder suffered in the year 304.

3. THE VENERABLE BARLAAM AND IOASAPH THE HEIR

Barlaam and Ioasaph were Indian ascetics. Ioasaph was son and heir to King Abenner. By God's providence, elder Barlaam visited him, taught him the Christian Faith and baptized him. After that, the elder withdrew to a mountain to live a life of asceticism, but Ioasaph remained to struggle with many temptations in the world, and by God's grace, to overcome them. Ioasaph finally succeeded in bringing his father to Christ. After he was baptized, King Abenner lived four years in deep repentance-for he had committed grave sins in persecuting Christians-and then ended his earthly existence and went to the better life. The young Ioasaph turned over the rule of the kingdom to his friend Barachias, and entered the wilderness to live a life of asceticism for the sake of Christ. His one desire on earth was to see his spiritual father, elder Barlaam, once again. The merciful God fulfilled his desire, and one day Ioasaph stood before Barlaam's cave and cried out: "Bless me, father!" Elder Barlaam labored in asceticism in the wilderness for seventy years and lived one hundred years in all. St. Ioasaph himself left his kingdom at the age of twenty-five, and went into the wilderness where he lived for thirty-five years. They both had great love for the Lord Jesus, brought many to the true Faith and entered into the eternal joy of their Lord.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR HELIODORUS

Heliodorus was from the town of Maggido in Pamphylia and suffered for the Christian Faith in the time of Emperor Aurelian. During his harsh tortures, he heard a voice from heaven: "Be not afraid, I am with thee!" Thrown into a glowing-hot brazen ox, he fervently prayed to God and God saved him. All at once, the glowing ox cooled, and Heliodorus emerged alive. The judge cried out to him that he had performed some magic. To this, the martyr replied: "My magic is Christ!" He was beheaded and went to the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE BARLAAM AND IOASAPH THE HEIR

When Ioasaph witnessed illness, old age and death,
He was sincerely ashamed of this life.
"Behold, even I can be ill like that,
And old age can make me stooped like this,
And death may come when I least expect it!
In the suffering of others I bitterly suffer.
Is there anyone living who knows the secret of the mystery
And can reveal a better life?"
Then, from the dense mountain, Barlaam descended,
And spoke truth to the young heir.
And the elder told him of the One God-
Of the Father Who reigns with the Spirit and the Son-
Of the creation of the world, and Paradise, most beautiful;
Of the first Adam, in the effulgence of Paradise;
Of cursed sin that brought us death;
Of Christ Who bore the heavy Cross for us;
Of life eternal, better than this;
Of the infinite glory of the Kingdom of Christ.
When Ioasaph had heard the all-wise Barlaam,
A bright day dawned for him, and the darkness of night passed away.

REFLECTION

A tale of the Elder Barlaam to Ioasaph: A man was fleeing from a terrifying unicorn. Fleeing thus, he fell into a pit, but grabbed hold of a tree. Just when he thought that he was out of danger, he looked down below the tree and saw two mice, one black and one white, gnawing alternately but continuously at the roots of the tree, so as to gnaw through and bring the tree crashing down. Looking down even further, he saw a huge, terrifying serpent which, with its jaws wide open, was waiting to devour the man when the tree would fall down. He then saw four smaller poisonous snakes around his feet. Looking upward, the man saw a little bit of honey on a branch, and forgetting all the danger that surrounded him, extended his hand to reach that little bit of sweetness in the tree. The interpretation is this: The unicorn represents death, which from Adam to now pursues every man to kill him; the pit filled with all sorts of dangers is this world; the tree is the path of our life; the white and black mice are days and nights, that continue one after the other to shorten our life; the huge and horrible snake is hell; the four poisonous snakes are the four elements from which the body of man is composed; the little bit of honey on the branch of the tree is the little sweetness that this life offers to man. Oh, if only men would not be captivated by that inconsequential sweetness, forgetting the terrible dangers that surround them and draw them down to eternal ruin!

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 1**):

1. How on the sixth day God created the cattle and the small creatures and the wild beasts after their own kind;
2. How God saw that it was good.

HOMILY

-on glorifying God because of Christ the Lord-

Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Ephesians 3:21).

Glory be to God! Glory be to God in the Church! Glory be to Him because of Christ Jesus! Glory be to Him throughout all generations! Glory be to Him unto ages of ages! No one befits being glorified as does God, nor does anyone glorify God as does the Church of God. Christ is the revealer of God: hence, all the glory given to God must go through Christ the Lord. The Church will endure beyond all races and generations to the end of time; the Church is the most pure body of Christ, filled with might, wisdom and miracle-working; and hence the glory of God is proclaimed from the Church: from the holy place to the Holy One, from purity to the Pure One. Glorification from the Church is most pleasing to God also, because there are many souls and voices in the Church, but they are all of one accord and of one voice. Therefore, let no one separate himself from the common glorification of God, and let no one even think that his own glorification of God in isolation and separation is better than the glorification of God in the unity and fullness of all the faithful. It is not true that one member is lost in the multitude, that his voice is not heard before God. Does not the hand do its work only when it is inseparably bound to the body? And so it is with each member of the body, just as it is with each of the faithful. When he prays in and with the Church (and even if he is in the desert he can pray in and with the Church), not separating himself from the Church, he is better heard and seen by God. His soul finds a much repeated echo in the souls of the other faithful, and so he is greatly distinguished and recognized in his prayer within the unity of the body of the Church rather than outside of it.

O Lord Jesus, only from Thee, in Thee, and through Thee can we glorify God.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE GREGORY OF DECAPOLIS

Gregory was born in Isaurian Decapolis of prominent and devout parents, Sergius and Mary. After he had completed his schooling, his parents desired that he marry, but he fled to the wilderness and was tonsured a monk. He lived in various places: Byzantium, Rome and on Mount Olympus. Wherever he was, he amazed men by his asceticism and miracles. At times a heavenly light illumined him and angels of God appeared to him. He gazed upon the beauty of the angels and listened to their sweet chanting. He lived a long and God-pleasing life and died peacefully in the ninth century in Constantinople, his soul taking up its abode in the joy of his Lord.

2. SAINT PROCLUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Proclus was a disciple of St. John Chrysostom. In the year 426 he was consecrated Bishop of Cyzicus, and in 435 was chosen Patriarch of Constantinople. He governed the Church of God as a prudent hierarch. During his tenure, two significant events occurred. The first was the translation of the relics of St. John Chrysostom from Comana to Constantinople, at the desire of both the emperor and the patriarch. Emperor Theodosius the Younger was then reigning with his sister, Pulcheria. The second event was the great earthquake in Constantinople and the surrounding countryside. Many of the largest and most beautiful buildings were destroyed by this terrible earthquake. Then the patriarch, with the emperor, many of the clergy, nobles and people, came out in a procession of supplication. As they were praying to God, a child was miraculously lifted high in the air, until he was out of sight. Then he returned and was lowered gently to the ground. Asked where he had been, the child replied that he had been lifted up to heaven among the angels and that he had heard the angels sing: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!" Upon hearing this, all the people in the procession began to sing it and the earthquake ceased immediately. From that time on, this beautiful hymn was adopted by the Church. The child soon reposed, and was interred in the Church of St. Irene. In all, St. Proclus served as a hierarch for twenty years and reposed peacefully in the Lord in the year 446.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS EUSTATHIUS, THESPESIUS AND ANATOLIUS

Eustathius, Thespesius and Anatolius were blood brothers from Nicomedia. Their parents, Philotheus and Eusebia, were pagans who received the true Faith from St. Anthimus, Bishop of Nicomedia, as did their sons. Philotheus was ordained a presbyter. When he and his wife reposed, a terrible persecution of Christians was perpetrated under the evil Emperor Maximian, and Philotheus's three sons were brought to trial. Accused, interrogated and tortured in various ways, they were finally condemned to death. Angels appeared to them many times in prison and gave them manna to eat, filling their young hearts with strength, courage and endurance. When they were led to the place of execution, two friends, Palladius and Acacius, approached them and spoke with them. While they were still speaking, the holy martyrs gave up their souls to God. The soldiers then severed their lifeless heads and took them to show to the judge. They suffered for Christ the Lord in about the year 313, and took up their habitation in the Immortal Kingdom of Christ.

4. SAINT ISAAC, ARCHBISHOP OF ARMENIA

Isaac was born in Constantinople when his father was an envoy of the Armenian king to the Byzantine court. Isaac was the tenth Archbishop of Armenia, and in that calling, governed the Church for fifty years. His episcopacy was distinguished, among other things, by the translation of the Holy Scriptures into the Armenian language. He was told in a vision that the Armenians would eventually fall away from the pure Faith of Orthodoxy. This eminent hierarch entered peacefully into rest in the year 440 and reposed in the Lord.

5. THE THREE HOLY VIRGINS

All three were Persians. At the time of King Sapor, these three virgins were persecuted as Christians, and were finally cut to pieces with knives. Three fig trees grew out of their graves that healed all manner of pains and illnesses.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PROCLUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Glorious disciple of a glorious teacher,
O most-wise Proclus, servant of the Savior,
You strengthened the Faith and destroyed heresy,
For which the Holy Church praises you,
And the Church magnifies its giant,
Who, by glorifying God, glorified himself.
As a skilled helmsman, you guided the Church,
Beheld miracles and glorified God.
Clairvoyant of spirit, with a mind filled with grace,
You resonated with the Spirit like a finely tuned string.
Taught by the Spirit, you instructed the emperor
To transport the relics of the golden-mouthed Patriarch,
And with the emperor and the people you openly beheld
Glorious miracles manifest from the relics.
Now, in Paradise eternal, pray for us,
That the faithful endure in the Faith to the end!

REFLECTION

No mortal has interpreted the Epistles of the Apostle Paul with greater love and depth than St. John Chrysostom. Had St. Paul himself interpreted them, he could not have interpreted them better. Behold, history tells us that it was Paul himself who interpreted them through the mind and the pen of Chrysostom. When St. Proclus was a novice under Chrysostom, during the time that he was patriarch, it was his duty to announce visitors. A certain nobleman was slandered before Emperor Arcadius and the emperor had expelled him from the court. This nobleman came to implore Chrysostom to intercede with the emperor on his behalf. Proclus went to announce him to the patriarch but, looking through the partly opened door, saw a man bent over the patriarch, whispering something in his ear while the patriarch wrote. This continued until dawn. Meanwhile, Proclus told the nobleman to come back the next evening, while he himself remained in amazement, wondering who the man with the patriarch was, and how he managed to enter the patriarch's chamber unannounced. The second night the same thing happened again, and Proclus was in still greater amazement. The third night the same thing happened again, and Proclus was in the greatest amazement. When Chrysostom asked him if the nobleman had come by, he replied that he had already been waiting for three nights, but that he couldn't announce him because of the elderly, balding stranger who had been whispering in the patriarch's ear for three nights. The astonished Chrysostom said that he did not remember anyone entering to see him during the previous three nights. He asked his novice what the stranger looked like, and Proclus pointed to the icon of the Holy Apostle Paul, saying that the man was like him. Therefore, it was the Apostle Paul himself who was directing the mind and pen of his greatest interpreter.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 1**):

1. How the Holy Trinity took counsel together about the creation of man;
2. How God created man in His own image.

HOMILY

-on behavior in accordance with one's calling-

... that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering (Ephesians 4:1-2).

Be not proud, be not angry, be not faint-hearted; for these are unworthy of a Christian calling. This calling is so elevated and wonderful that it is difficult for a man to safeguard himself from pride; yet it is difficult to keep oneself above faint-heartedness when dangers and losses occur. Against these three unhealthy states, the Apostle emphasizes three healthy states: against pride, lowliness; against anger, meekness; against faint-heartedness, longsuffering. It must be said that these three virtues—lowliness, meekness and longsuffering—do not express in full measure the loftiness of the Christian calling. But then, nothing in this world can fully express the height of the Christian calling. The preciousness and richness of this calling cannot be seen here on earth: it is like a closed chest that a man carries through this world, but only opens it and avails himself of its riches in the other world. Only someone who could raise himself to the highest heavens and see Christ the Lord in glory with the angels and the saints could assess the loftiness of the Christian calling; for there is the victorious assembly of all God's chosen ones from earth who were made worthy of this exceedingly high honor.

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, Thy name is the name most dear to us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 21 -

1. THE ENTRY INTO THE TEMPLE OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS

When the Most-holy Virgin Mary reached the age of three, her holy parents Joachim and Anna took her from Nazareth to Jerusalem to dedicate her to the service of God according to their earlier promise. It was a three-day journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem but, traveling to do a God-pleasing work, this journey was not difficult for them. Many kinsmen of Joachim and Anna gathered in Jerusalem to take part in this event, at which the invisible angels of God were also present. Leading the procession into the Temple were virgins with lighted tapers in their hands, then the Most-holy Virgin, led on one side by her father and on the other side by her mother. The virgin was clad in vesture of royal magnificence and adornments as was befitting the **“King's daughter, the Bride of God” (Psalm 45:13-15)**. Following them were many kinsmen and friends, all with lighted tapers. Fifteen steps led up to the Temple. Joachim and Anna lifted the Virgin onto the first step, then she ran quickly to the top herself, where she was met by the High Priest Zacharias, who was to be the father of St. John the Forerunner. Taking her by the hand, he led her not only into the Temple, but into the “Holy of Holies,” the holiest of holy places, into which no one but the high priest ever entered, and only once each year, at that. St. Theophylact of Ohrid says that Zacharias “was outside himself and possessed by God” when he led the Virgin into the holiest place in the Temple, beyond the second curtain—otherwise, his action could not be explained. Mary's parents then offered sacrifice to God according to the Law, received the priest's blessing and returned home. The Most-holy Virgin remained in the Temple and dwelt there for nine full years. While her parents were alive, they visited her often, especially Righteous Anna. When God called her parents from this world, the Most-holy Virgin was left an orphan and did not wish to leave the Temple until death or to enter into marriage. As that would have been against the Law and custom of Israel, she was given to St. Joseph, her kinsman in Nazareth, after reaching the age of twelve. Under the acceptable role of one betrothed, she could live in virginity and thus fulfill her desire and formally satisfy the Law, for it was then unknown in Israel for maidens to vow virginity to the end of their lives. The Most-holy Virgin Mary was the first of such life-vowed virgins, of the thousands and thousands of virgin men and women who would follow her in the Church of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINTS JOACHIM AND ANNA

The parents of the Holy Virgin
Lead her to the holy Temple,
And according to their promise
They give her to the Lord.
They lead the Temple to the Temple,
While angels chant,
And chant with joy
To the young Virgin in purest attire.

The virgins accompany our Virgin,
With hymns and tapers;
Zacharias leads her
To the Holy of Holies;
And into the Holy Place he takes her,
Where the awesome mystery is hidden.

Where the Ark of the Covenant is,
Where the golden lampstand is,
Where the staff and the manna are,
Into the guarding place of all mysteries;
There the pure Virgin is led—
The Mystical Ark of the Living Christ.

REFLECTION

Submit yourself to the will of God and do not pry too closely into God's judgments, for you can lose your mind. The judgments of God are innumerable and unfathomable. A monk in the wilderness, imagining that he had attained perfection, prayed to God that He would reveal to him His various judgments in the lives of men. God put the thought in his mind to go to a distant place to inquire of a spiritual elder concerning this. However, while the monk was on his way, an angel of God in the form of an ordinary man joined him, saying that he too wanted to go to that elder. Thus traveling together, they came upon the house of a God-fearing man, who treated them well, giving them to eat from a silver platter. When they had eaten, the angel took the platter and threw it into the sea. The monk found this both amazing and unjust, but he remained silent. The second day they came upon the house of another hospitable man who cordially received and treated them as kinsmen. Before leaving, that man brought out his only son for the travelers to bless. The angel of God then took the child by the throat and strangled him. The monk was greatly angered and asked the angel who he was, and why he had committed such misdeeds. The angel meekly replied to him: "The first man was pleasing to God in all things and had nothing in his house that was attained by injustice except that silver platter. By God's judgment, I threw that stolen platter away, so that the man would be righteous before God in all things. The other man was pleasing to God and had nothing in his house that would bring down the wrath of God except his son, who-had he matured-would have become a great criminal and a demonic vessel. Therefore, by God's judgment, I strangled that child in time to save his soul, for the sake of his father's goodness, and to save the father from many miseries. Behold, such are the mysteries and the unfathomable judgments of God. And you, elder, should return to your cell and not strive vainly by inquiring into that which is in the authority of the One God."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 2**):

1. How God created man from the dust of the earth;
2. How He breathed the spirit of life into his nostrils;
3. How man became a living soul.

HOMILY

-on the faithful as one body and one spirit-

...There is one body and one spirit (Ephesians 4:4).

The Holy Apostle counsels the faithful to strive to be **one body and one spirit**. By **one body** is understood "one Faith," without divisions, without heresies and without self-will: the whole Church is one body of which Christ is the Head. By **one spirit** is understood "love," the ardent love of all the faithful for Christ, from which proceeds mutual love. The many become as one; many men become as one man. This is the miracle of the Christian Faith and Christian love. There is no power in the world which can be a stronger bond among men: not the same blood, or the same language, or the same hearth, or the same parents, or any type of common material interests. None of these is even nearly as powerful a bond as Christian faith and love. By this powerful, irresistible bond, all the members of the Church are bound to each other. The Church of God stands as one man, in time and in eternity-**one body and one spirit**. There is nothing more contradictory to this wondrous unity than the pride of individual men. Pride distorts faith, cools love, creates heresies, divides the Church, and sacrifices the good of the whole for individual satisfaction. Pride, in essence, is the absence of both faith and love. Brethren, may God save us from pride, the primal infirmity of the human race, that we may always be **one body and one spirit** in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To Thee, O Lord Jesus; to Thee, the Head of the Church, be glory and praise forever. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR CECILIA

Cecilia was born in Rome of wealthy and eminent parents. She had great faith in Christ the Lord and a great zeal for the Faith. Vowing life-long virginity to God, St. Cecilia wore a coarse hair shirt beneath the costly raiment that her parents gave her. When her parents coerced her into marriage with Valerian, a pagan, Cecilia counseled her bridegroom on their wedding night to go to Bishop Urban to be baptized, and then live in chastity. Accepting the Christian Faith, Valerian also converted his brother Tiburtius. Soon after, both brothers were condemned to death for their faith. But their faithfulness did not falter, even in the face of death. Led to the place of execution, these wonderful brothers also succeeded in converting the captain of the guard, Maximus, to the Faith. Then all three suffered together for Christ the Lord. St. Cecilia buried their bodies together. Cecilia was then brought to trial, for she tirelessly won pagans over to the Christian Faith. In only one evening, she won over four hundred souls. When the judge asked her from whence such boldness came, she answered: "From a pure conscience and undoubting faith." After cruel torture, Cecilia was condemned to beheading. The executioner struck her three times on the neck with the sword, but he was unable to kill her. She was only wounded, and blood flowed from her wounds, which the faithful collected in handkerchiefs, sponges and bowls for the sake of healing. Three days after this, the martyr and virgin of Christ gave her soul to her Lord, with Whom she eternally rejoices. St. Cecilia suffered with the others in about the year 230. Her relics lie in Rome, in the church dedicated to her. In the Western Church, St. Cecilia is regarded as the patroness of church singing and music.

2. SAINT CALLISTUS, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Callistus is called "Xanthopoulos" after the cell of that name on Mount Athos, where he lived for a long time in asceticism with his companion, Ignatius. With this same Ignatius, St. Callistus wrote in one hundred chapters of his personal experience of a life of stillness. This work occupies a very prominent place in ascetical literature. Callistus was greatly influenced by his teacher, St. Gregory of Sinai, and wrote his Life. Having become Patriarch of Constantinople, St. Callistus became ill and reposed while on a journey to Serbia. Before he undertook his journey this was prophesied to him by St. Maximus of Kapsokalyvia of the Holy Mountain.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR MENIGNUS

Menignus was born on the Hellespont. He worked as a linen-bleacher, for which he was called "the Fuller." At the time of Emperor Decius, he tore up the imperial decree declaring a persecution of Christians. For this, he was thrown into prison, where the Lord Himself appeared to him and encouraged him, saying: "Be not afraid, I am with thee." At that moment his chains melted like wax, the prison opened of itself, and he went out. He was arrested again and tried. They tortured him inhumanly, severing his fingers and toes and beheading him. At night, his severed head glowed like a lamp.

4. THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS MICHAEL THE SOLDIER

Michael was a Bulgarian by birth. With his companions, he fought in the Greek army against the Hagarenes and Ethiopians, where he displayed marvelous fearlessness. He killed a terrible serpent and freed a maiden. Soon afterward, this righteous man took up his abode in eternal life. He lived and reposed in the ninth century. He was first buried somewhere in Thrace, but Emperor Kalo-John translated his relics to Trnovo in 1206.

5. THE HOLY APOSTLES PHILEMON AND ARCHIPPUS, AND THE HOLY MARTYR APPHIA (SEE FEBRUARY 19)

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR CECILIA

Cecilia-strong in faith, rich in faith-
Her faith is more beautiful than the stars, more precious than gold.
She nailed herself to the Lord, as to the Cross,
And sacrificed youth, joy, marriage and honor for Christ!
The cruel demon could steal nothing from her;
And when only her body remained, she gave it to Christ.
For the love of Christ, she gave the whole world-
Even two worlds: her body and her pure soul.
Thus does the flame of faith burn, and the flame of love,
And by that flame, Cecilia glorified herself.

REFLECTION

Every effort of learning is in vain without the effort of attaining purity of faith and life. The heavenly world is revealed not to the learned but to the pure. When St. Cecilia was led to the bridal chamber with her bridegroom Valerian on the first night, she said him: "I want to tell you a mystery: standing here is an angel of God, the guardian of my virginity, whom you do not see. He stands ready to protect me, his handmaid, from assault. If you only touch me, he will kill you." Valerian begged Cecilia to show him the angel, so that he could see it, too. The virgin replied: "You are a man who knows not the true God. You cannot see the angel of God until you cleanse yourself of the foulness of your unbelief." When Valerian was baptized, he saw the angel in great light and ineffable beauty. So, too, when Valerian's brother Tiburtius changed his life from impurity to purity in baptism, he saw holy angels and spoke with them. Maximus their fellow sufferer as well, when the two brothers were beheaded, vowed with a great oath before the executioners and the people, saying: "I see angels of God shining like the sun, taking the souls of these martyrs from their bodies like beautiful virgins from the bridal chamber, and leading them to heaven with great glory." But that which he saw, none of the impure unbelievers were able to see.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 2**):

1. How God planted a paradisaal garden in Eden and placed man there;
2. How God made trees in Paradise, beautiful to look at and good for food;
3. How God brought all the animals before man and he named them.

HOMILY

-on that which constitutes the unity of the faithful-

... One Lord, one Faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:5-6).

Here is the all-important and extremely obvious reason for all Christians to keep **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3)** and be **one body and one spirit (Ephesians 4:4)**. For the One Lord Jesus Christ is our Creator, Redeemer and Resurrector. There are not two true Christs, that there should be division among us. One and the same blood was shed upon the Cross for us all, just as one and the same mouth prayed for us all in Gethsemane. We have one Faith in the Holy Trinity, undivided and life-creating-the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in Essence and three in Persons-the Unbegotten Father, the Begotten Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father. We have one Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This Baptism is by threefold immersion in water, for death to sin and the devil, and for the resurrection and life in Christ the Lord. **One God and Father of all-the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, Who through Christ and because of Christ adopts us and gives us the right to say to Him, Our Father.**

Do you see, my brethren, how strong are the bonds that unite us? Not even the stars themselves are bound by stronger bonds, nor the water to the earth, nor fire to the air. Do you see the overwhelming reasons that we have for unity? Everything else that, from the left hand, would urge us to division is inconsequential compared to these reasons, like a grain of sand compared to the high mountains. The devil cannot destroy our unity if we do not help him. The devil can never conquer us if we do not surrender ourselves to him.

O Lord Jesus, sweet and gracious, how firmly Thou hast bound us for eternal good! Keep us, we pray, in this bond.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT AMPHILOCHIUS, BISHOP OF ICONIUM

Amphilochius was a fellow countryman, companion and friend of St. Basil the Great and other great saints of the fourth century. Amphilochius left the uproar of the world early in life and withdrew to a cave where, as a hermit, he lived in asceticism for forty years. It then happened that the episcopal throne in Iconium was vacated, and Amphilochius, in a wondrous manner, was chosen and consecrated Bishop of Iconium. He was a splendid shepherd and a great defender of the purity of the Orthodox Faith. He took part in the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. He fought zealously against the impious Macedonius, the Arians and the Eunomians. He personally begged Theodosius the Great to expel all the Arians from every city in the empire, but the emperor did not heed him. A few days later, Amphilochius came before the emperor again. When the bishop was led into the reception chamber, the emperor was sitting on his throne, and on his right sat his son Arcadius, whom Theodosius had taken as his co-emperor. Entering the chamber, St. Amphilochius bowed to Emperor Theodosius but paid no attention to Arcadius, the emperor's son, as if he were not there. Greatly enraged at this, Emperor Theodosius ordered that Amphilochius be immediately expelled from the court. The saint then said to the emperor: "Do you see, O Emperor, how you do not tolerate disrespect to your son? So too, God the Father does not tolerate disrespect to His Son, and is disgusted with the corruptness of those who blaspheme Him and is angered at all those adherents of that cursed (Arian) heresy." Hearing this, the emperor then understood why Amphilochius had not given honor to his son, and was amazed at his wisdom and daring. Among many other works, St. Amphilochius wrote several books on the Faith. He entered into rest in great old age in the year 395 and took up his habitation in eternal life.

2. SAINT GREGORY, BISHOP OF AGRIGENTUM

Gregory was born of devout parents, Chariton and Theodota in Sicily near the town of Agrigentum, where he was later bishop. His entire life was imbued with God's wonderful miracles. In a miraculous manner, he went to Jerusalem; in a miraculous manner, he was chosen as bishop; and in a miraculous manner, he was saved from slander. He himself was a great miracle-worker, for he was a great God-pleaser, a great spiritual father and an ascetic. He participated at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553. After difficult trials he reposed peacefully near the end of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh.

3. SAINT ALEXANDER NEVSKY

Alexander was the son of Prince Yaroslav. From childhood, his heart was directed to God. He defeated the Swedes on the river Neva on July 15, 1240, for which he received the appellation "Nevsky" ["of the Neva"]. On that occasion, Saints Boris and Gleb appeared to one of Alexander's commanders and promised their help to the great prince, who was their kinsman. Once, among the Golden Horde of the Tartars, he refused to bow down to idols or to pass through fire. Because of his wisdom, physical strength and beauty, even the Tartar Khan respected him. He built many churches and performed countless works of mercy. He entered into rest on November 14, 1263 at the age of forty-three. On this day, November 23, the translation of his relics to the town of Vladimir is commemorated.

4. SAINT MITROPHAN, BISHOP OF VORONEZH

Mitrophan was a glorious Russian hierarch, ascetic and patriot. He was a friend, and later a critic, of Peter the Great. He entered into rest on November 23, 1703. His wonderworking relics were uncovered in the year 1832.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT ALEXANDER NEVSKY

A knight of Christ, St. Alexander,
A prince of the people and servant of the Lord-
Ruler on earth and slave of the Almighty-
This was the life of Nevsky.
On the outside opulence, on the inside weeping;
On the outside struggle, on the inside serenity;
On the outside illusion, on the inside truth.
Christ was the prize of this hero,
Both in war and deceptive peace.
In torment, Christ was his joy,
In suffering, Christ was his assurance,
In victory, Christ was the victor,
And in death, Christ was his Resurrector!
To him, in both worlds, all was Christ!
He was the end; He was the living goal.
The pious prince was an exemplar to his people,
Of how one should serve the Lord.
O holy Prince, help us also,
By your brilliant power, by your holy prayers!

REFLECTION

God permits misfortune to befall the righteous, that He might glorify them more greatly. The overcoming of misfortune reveals both the glory of God and the glory of the righteous. St. Gregory of Agrigentum was, in all things, righteous and pleasing to God. But God permitted misfortune to befall him, similar to that misfortune that once overtook St. Athanasius and St. Macarius. Two priests, Sabinus and Crescens, for whom Gregory had done much good, could not at all tolerate Gregory's virtuousness. For such is the nature of vice, that it cannot tolerate virtue. Consequently, Sabinus and Crescens found a notorious prostitute and bribed her to malign Gregory by saying that he had had immoral relations with her. So it was that when Gregory was in church, the woman crept into his bedroom, and just as Gregory came out of church with the people, she emerged from his room. The two priests began to revile Gregory as a libertine. However, Gregory was composed and prepared for every suffering. They confined him in prison and then transferred him to Rome. The pope believed the slanderers and kept Gregory in prison for two and a half years, without a trial or a verdict. A council was then convened to try Gregory's case, but God judged before man could judge. The woman went insane and was brought mad before the council. She was unable to answer any questions. Gregory, the miracle-worker, prayed to God for her and she was healed, for the evil spirit came out of her. Then, through her tears, she confessed that she had been bribed to malign the man of God, and that immediately after she had committed the slander, the evil spirit had entered her and held her in its power. Sabinus and Crescens, along with the other maligners-more than a hundred in number-found their faces suddenly turned as black as coal, and they were punished with exile. St. Gregory was returned to his diocese and was received with great exultation by his people.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 2**):

1. How God gave the first people all the plants and all the fruitful trees for food;
2. How He forbade them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they die.

HOMILY

-on grace and gifts-

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:7).

Here is the beginning of distinctions among Christians. At first, the Apostle enumerated that which unites us, that is, **one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:5-6)**. Nevertheless, here he emphasizes that which makes us unwillingly different. The measure of the gift of Christ makes us different, the measure according to which the grace of the Holy Spirit is given. Christ is the Head of the great body that is called the Church. He creates that body and, individually, every member of that body; He is the Builder and He is the only One who knows the plan of that building. He does not allow one member in this building to be disproportionately great or small. He gives the proper measure to everything and everyone. Thus, He gives one five talents, another two, and another, one. He measures, and the Holy Spirit pours out His grace accordingly. No one should be angry or envious. No one should be angry, for if he has received less, he will have less to answer for. No one should be envious, for if someone has received more, it is not his, but God's. If he has much, much will be asked of him, as it is said in the divine parable of the talents.

O my brethren, let every one of us be conscious of the measure of our gift and our responsibility. Let us respect our gift and the gift of our neighbor, for all gifts are from God and are God's.

O Lord Jesus, the great Giver of diverse gifts, to Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR CATHERINE

Catherine was the daughter of King Constus. After the death of her father, she lived with her mother in Alexandria. Her mother was secretly a Christian who, through her spiritual father, brought Catherine to the Christian Faith. In a vision, St. Catherine received a ring from the Lord Jesus Himself as a sign of her betrothal to Him. This ring remains on her finger even today. Catherine was greatly gifted by God and was well educated in Greek philosophy, medicine, rhetoric and logic. In addition to that, she was of unusual physical beauty. When the iniquitous Emperor Maxentius offered sacrifices to the idols and ordered others to do the same, Catherine boldly confronted the emperor and denounced his idolatrous errors. The emperor, seeing that she was greater than he in wisdom and knowledge, summoned fifty of his wisest men to debate with her on matters of faith and to put her to shame. Catherine outwitted and shamed them. In a rage, the emperor ordered all fifty of those men burned. By St. Catherine's prayers, all fifty confessed the name of Christ and declared themselves Christians before their execution. After Catherine had been put in prison, she converted the emperor's commander, Porphyrius, and two hundred soldiers to the true Faith, as well as Empress Augusta-Vasilissa herself. They all suffered for Christ. During the torture of St. Catherine, an angel of God came to her and destroyed the wheel on which the holy virgin was being tortured. Afterward, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared to her and comforted her. After many tortures, Catherine was beheaded at the age of eighteen, on November 24, 310. Milk, instead of blood, flowed from her body. Her miracle-working relics repose on Mount Sinai.

2. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR MERCURIUS

When Emperor Decius once waged war against the barbarians, there was in his army the commander of an Armenian regiment called the Martenesians. This commander was named Mercurius. In battle, an angel of the Lord appeared to Mercurius, placed a sword in his hand, and assured him of victory over his enemies. Indeed, Mercurius displayed wonderful courage, mowing down the enemy like grass. Following this glorious victory Emperor Decius made him chief commander of his army, but envious men reported Mercurius to the emperor for being a Christian, a fact which he did not hide but openly acknowledged before the emperor. Mercurius was tortured harshly and at length; he was cut into strips with knives and burned with fire. An angel of God appeared to him in prison and healed him. Finally, the emperor proclaimed that General Mercurius be beheaded in Cappadocia. When they beheaded him, his body became as white as snow and emitted a most wonderful incense-like fragrance. His miracle-working relics healed many of the sick. This most wonderful soldier of Christ suffered for the Faith sometime between the years 251 and 259 and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of his King and God.

3. THE HOLY VIRGIN MASTRIDIA

Mastridia lived in Alexandria and led a solitary life of prayer and handiwork. A young man, burning with bodily passion toward her, constantly harassed her. Not wanting to sin before God, and since she could not easily be rid of this unrestrained youth, St. Mastridia once asked him what attracted him most to her. He replied: "Your eyes!" Mastridia then took the needle with which she was sewing and put out her eyes. Thus, Mastridia preserved her peace and the young man's soul. The young man repented deeply, and became a monk.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR CATHERINE

The wise Catherine, an earthly princess,
Became a martyr for Christ the Savior.
Foolish Maxentius offered her life:
If she would consent to become his wife!
The holy Catherine, pure as gold,
Replied to the emperor thus:
"My betrothed is the Risen Christ,
And I desire not the love of a corrupt man.
You seek my body: the rotten seeks corruption,
Even as the incorrupt spirit seeks immortality.
The physical covering must wither away,
The true man takes care for his immortal soul.
Do what you wish, and torture me-
Burn me in the fire, turn me on a wheel;
I cannot renounce my own soul,
Nor worship any but Christ as God.
Remember, O Emperor, soon you will die,
And worms will erupt from your corpse-
Worms will glorify you, worms will eat you,
A curse will accompany you, and a curse will meet you:
For you dare wage war against Christ, Who is mightier than death.
You stand under the Rock, and He will crush you."
Holy Catherine, Christ's virgin,
You despised the throne for eternal truth's sake;
And thus now reign in the Kingdom without end,
And sing with the angels, in the midst of sweet Paradise.

REFLECTION

A tale of Elder Barlaam to Ioasaph: The citizens in a certain town had a custom of choosing as king a stranger who did not know their laws and customs. After they had crowned him king, they clothed him in beautiful robes, fed him abundantly and surrounded him with every luxury. However, as soon as one year had elapsed, they deposed their king, stripped him of all his goods and his clothes, and drove him completely naked to a distant island, where he had neither bread nor roof nor companions, and where he would die in misery and humiliation. The citizens of this town would then choose another king, also a stranger and also for one year; then a third, then a fourth, then a fifth and so forth. But it once happened that they chose a very wise and cautious man. He learned from his servants what had happened to the kings of this town after their year. Therefore, over the course of the whole year he zealously gathered food and goods and daily sent them to that island. When the year had run out and when he was stripped of his clothing and cast onto the island, he found himself amidst an enormous quantity of food, silver, gold and precious stones, and continued to live there even better than he lived as king in that town. The interpretation is this: The town represents the world; the citizens represent the evil spirits; the kings are men, either foolish or wise. The foolish men think only of the pleasures of this life, as if it were eternal; but in the end, death cuts everything off and they, naked of all good works, go to hell. The wise, however, perform many good works, and send these good works ahead of them to the other world. At their repose, the wise kings-the good men-depart to that world where their accumulated riches await them, and where they reign in greater eternal glory and beauty than they reigned here on earth.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 2**):

1. How God brought all animals, birds and beasts before Adam, to see how he would name them;
2. How Adam gave a name to every animal and every bird and every beast.

HOMILY

-on Him Who descended and ascended-

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things (Ephesians 4:10).

In His love for man, the Lord Jesus Christ lowered Himself so low that He could go no lower; and then raised Himself so high that, in truth, He could go no higher. He descended **into the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9)**; into hades itself, where He freed the forefathers, prophets and righteous ones, and led them into the Kingdom of Heaven. Completing His work both on earth and in hades, He ascended **far above all heavens**. The same One Who ascended is the very same One Who descended without any change, except that He descended without a body, and ascended with a body. Therefore, there are not both a Son of God and a Son of Man as heretics have said, but Christ is both the Son of God and the Son of Man-one and the same Person-one and the same God-man, our Savior Jesus Christ. As He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, so He is the same in the depths and in the heights: on earth, in hades, and in the heavens. He abased Himself lower than all men, and raised Himself above all the angelic powers, to show by example the truthfulness of His words: **And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:12)**. If we are not humbled by virtues, then sin will humble us. Virtue leads to voluntary and temporary abasement, but sin leads to irreversible and eternal abasement.

O Lord Jesus, Who fills all by Thy power, fill us with the spirit of true humility.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HIEROMARTYR CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ROME

Clement was born in Rome of royal lineage and was a contemporary of the holy apostles. His mother and two brothers, traveling on the sea, were carried by a storm to different places. His father then went to find his wife and two sons and he, too, became lost. Clement, being twenty-four years old, then set out for the east to seek his parents and brothers. In Alexandria, he made the acquaintance of the Apostle Barnabas and, afterward, joined the Apostle Peter whom his two brothers, Faustinus and Faustinian, were already following. By God's providence, the Apostle Peter came upon Clement's mother as an aged beggar woman, and then found his father as well. Thus, the whole family was united, and all returned to Rome as Christians. Clement did not separate himself from the great apostle, who appointed him as bishop before his death. After Peter's martyrdom, Linus was Bishop of Rome, then Cletus-both of them for a short time-and then Clement. Clement governed the Church of God with flaming zeal, and from day to day brought a great number of unbelievers to the Christian Faith. In addition, he ordered seven scribes to write the lives of the Christian martyrs who were suffering at that time for their Lord. The Emperor Trajan banished him to Cherson, where Clement found about two thousand exiled Christians. All were occupied with the difficult job of hewing stones in a waterless land. The Christians received Clement with great joy and he was a living source of comfort to them. By his prayer, he brought forth water from the ground and converted so many of the unbelieving natives to Christianity that, in one year, seventy-five churches were built there. To prevent his spreading the Christian Faith even more, the authorities condemned Clement to death, and drowned him in the sea with a stone around his neck in the year 101. His miracle-working relics were removed from the sea only in the time of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

2. THE HIEROMARTYR PETER, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

Peter was a disciple and successor of St. Theonas, Archbishop of Alexandria, and was for a time a teacher at Origen's famous school of philosophy. He ascended the archiepiscopal throne in the year 299, and died a martyr's death in 311, beside the grave of the Holy Apostle Mark. He governed the Church in a most difficult era, when assaults were being made against the faithful by unbelievers from without, and by heretics from within. During his time, 670 Christians suffered in Alexandria. Often, whole families were led to the scaffold and executed. At the same time, the ungodly Arius was confusing the faithful with his false teaching. St. Peter cut him off from the Church and anathematized him, both in this world and in the next. The Lord Himself visited this great and wonderful saint in prison.

3. THE VENERABLE PAPHNUTIUS

Paphnutius never drank wine. Once, bandits seized him, and their leader forced him to drink a cup of wine. Seeing Paphnutius's kind nature, the chief of the bandits repented, and abandoned his brigandage.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HIEROMARTYR CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ROME

The aristocrat Clement, of noble birth,
Became a zealous servant of the Living Lord.
Scorning the vanity of opulent Rome,
He elevated his spirit above all illusion.
Spiritual kinship with Peter bound him,
And loosened his fleshly kinship to the emperor.
He shone in Rome as a radiant star,
Dispelling dense darkness with the Honorable Cross;
He adorned and strengthened the Apostolic Church,
And embittered the weak powers of the demons.
A tempest arose from demonic powers
Seeking to slay the saint of God.
His body they killed; his soul then fled to Paradise.
At the bottom of the waters of the sea, his holy body remained.
After eight centuries solid iron would have wasted away,
But not the body of this knight of Christ.
He gloriously manifested many miracles,
And through Christ God Clement was glorified.
O holy Clement, help even us
By your prayers before the throne of God.

REFLECTION

It is said of St. Peter of Alexandria that he never climbed the steps and sat on the patriarchal throne in church, but rather stood or sat before the steps of the throne. When the faithful complained that their hierarch did not sit in his place, he replied: "Whenever I approach the throne, I see a heavenly light and power upon it, and that is why I do not dare climb and sit on it." Beside this vision, St. Peter had another, yet more wondrous vision. While he was in prison, the impious heretic Arius hypocritically pretended that he had repented of his heresy, and sent word to the captive Peter that he had renounced his heresy, with an appeal to Peter to receive him into the Church again. Arius did this only because he thought that Peter would be martyred, and he could then acquire the patriarchal throne and disseminate and strengthen his heresy. Before he gave any reply, Peter prayed to God in the prison. During prayer, a mystical light illumined the prison, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him as a twelve-year-old boy, shining brighter than the sun, so that it was not possible to look at Him directly. The Lord was clothed in a white tunic, rent down the front from top to bottom. He clutched the garment around Himself with His hands, as though to hide His nakedness. At this, St. Peter was in great fear and horror. He cried out: "Who, O Savior, has torn Thy garment?" The Lord replied: "The madman Arius. He tore it, for he alienated My people from Me, whom I acquired by My Blood. Be careful not to receive him in communion with the Church, for he has cunning and diabolical thoughts against Me and My people." At this, St. Peter sent word to his priests, Achilles and Alexander, that he could not receive Arius's petition, for it was false and cunning; and the saint pronounced a curse on Arius in both worlds. He also prophesied that Achilles, and then Alexander, would succeed him as patriarch, and so it was.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 2**):

1. How God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and took one of his ribs;
2. How the Lord God made the woman Eve from Adam's rib and brought her to Adam;
3. How this is the foundation and reason for the mysterious attraction and unity of husband and wife.

HOMILY

-on the apportionment of functions and callings-

**And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets;
and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and
teachers (Ephesians 4:11).**

As the various organs in a man's body have different functions but all work in harmony for the good of the entire body, so the Lord instituted various organs with different functions in the Church, which is His Body. In the first place came the apostles, to whom was given not just one honor, but rather all honors; not one function, but rather all functions; not just one gift, but rather all the gifts of grace. The apostles were simultaneously apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The apostolic calling is not given anymore. Of the Great Apostles, there were twelve, the thirteenth being the Apostle Paul; and of the Lesser Apostles, there were seventy. The prophets are those who received the gift of prophecy from the Holy Spirit. Here, it is not the Old Testament prophets that are being discussed, but rather the New Testament prophets (**Acts 11:27, 21:10, 13:1**). The prophets were, and still are, prophets regardless of their class and position. The evangelists were firstly those who wrote the Gospels, and then missionaries who spread Christ's teaching among the unbelievers and, finally, the interpreters of Holy Scripture who in their writings presented the Christian truth for each and all. Pastors and teachers-these are actually one and the same calling, for it is difficult to imagine a pastor who is not a teacher at the same time. The pastors are limited to a certain place and a certain number of faithful whom they lead to salvation, and they govern the Church of God. So, the Lord ordained all of this through His holy apostles. Blessed is he who knows his function and gift received from the Spirit, and who serves according to his designation to the end. Just as the Holy Spirit now apportions His gifts, so the Lord, in His time, will apportion rewards.

O Lord, Holy Spirit, true God, help us to use Thy gifts to the end of our lives in humility, for the well-being of Christ's Church and for our eternal salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE ALYPIUS THE STYLITE

Alypius was born in Hadrianopolis, a city in Paphlagonia. From childhood, he was dedicated to the service of God. He served as a deacon with Bishop Theodore in the church in that city. But, desirous of a life of solitude, prayer and meditation, Alypius withdrew to a Greek cemetery outside the city. This was a cemetery from which people fled in terror, because of frequent demonic visions seen there. Alypius set up a cross in the cemetery and built a church in honor of St. Euphemia, who had appeared to him in a dream. Beside the church, he built a tall pillar, climbed on top of it, and spent fifty-three years there in fasting and prayer. Neither the mockery of men nor the evil of the demons was able to drive him away or cause him to waver in his intention. Alypius especially endured countless assaults from demons. Not only did the demons try to terrorize him with apparitions, but stoned him as well, and gave him no peace, day or night, for a long time. The courageous Alypius protected himself from the power of the demons by the sign of the Cross and the name of Jesus. Finally the demons were defeated and fled from him. Men began to revere him and come to him for prayer, consolation, instruction and healing. Two monasteries were built beside his pillar, one on one side for men and one on the other for women. His mother and sister lived in the women's monastery. St. Alypius guided the monks and nuns from his pillar, by example and words. He shone like the sun in the heavens for everyone, showing them the way to salvation. This God-pleaser had so much grace that he was often illuminated in heavenly light, and a pillar of this light extended to the heavens above him. St. Alypius was a wonderful and mighty miracle-worker in life, and also after his repose. He lived for one hundred years and entered into rest in the year 640, during the reign of Emperor Heraclius. His head is preserved in the Monastery of Koutloumousiou on the Holy Mountain.

2. THE VENERABLE JAMES THE SOLITARY

James was from Syria. He was a disciple of St. Maron (February 14) and a contemporary of St. Simeon the Stylite. He lived a life of asceticism under the open sky and ate soaked lentils. He performed great miracles, even raising the dead in the name of Christ. Emperor Leo asked him for his thoughts on the Council of Chalcedon [451]. He entered peacefully into rest in the year 457.

3. THE VENERABLE STYLIANUS

Stylianus was from Paphlagonia and a fellow countryman and contemporary of St. Alypius. He had a great love for the Lord Jesus, and because of this love gave himself up to great ascetic struggle. He renounced everything in order to have an undivided love for his Lord. Before his repose, angels came to take his soul, and his face shone like the sun. Stylianus was a great miracle-worker before and after his death. He especially helps sick children and childless couples.

4. THE VENERABLE NICON, THE PREACHER OF REPENTANCE

Nicon was born in Armenia. Awakened by the words of the Lord, **Every one that hath forsaken ... father or mother ... shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matthew 19:29)**, Nicon indeed forsook all for the sake of Christ, and went to a monastery, where he was tonsured a monk. When he was perfected in all virtues, he left the monastery and went to preach the Gospel among the people. He ceaselessly cried out, "Repent!" for which he was also called the "the Preacher of Repentance." As a preacher, he visited all of Anatolia and the Peloponnese. He worked miracles by prayer in the name of Christ and peacefully went to his beloved Lord. He reposed in Sparta in the year 998.

5. SAINT INNOCENT OF IRKUTSK, THE WONDERWORKER

He reposed in the year 1731, and his miracle-working relics were uncovered in 1804.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE ALYPIUS THE STYLITE

Loosed of all things, loosed from the world:
From life's concerns and from the oppression of the passions.
Complete devotion to prayer and divine contemplation
Brought glory to St. Alypius.
On a pillar tall, he raised himself:
The farther from earth, the closer to God!
Complete devotion to prayer and divine contemplation
Brought glory to St. Alypius.
Let thunders resound, they will not strike,
The Lord directs and moves the lightning.
Utter devotion to prayer and divine contemplation
Brought glory to St. Alypius.
In prayer, he shone as the bright sun,
And his name, through the centuries, distinctly remains.
His meditations on God have made him immortal:
Wondrous Alypius the God-pleaser.
Now in the heavens a great pillar shines,
Which is the radiant soul of St. Alypius.
And now he is wholly devoted to prayer for us-
Alypius the Stylite, both yesterday and today.
Even now, evil spirits flee him,
And we rejoice in St. Alypius.

REFLECTION

Many learned pagans entered the Church of Christ and were baptized precisely because the Church preached immortal life as a proven fact and not as a speculation of human reason. St. Clement of Rome had studied all of Greek philosophy, yet his soul remained unsatisfied and empty. As a young man of twenty-four, he desired to know with all his soul if there were another, better life than this. Philosophy gave him only the thoughts of various men, but no real proof. He mourned for his lost parents and brothers and was tormented constantly by not knowing if he would be able to see them in some other life. The All-seeing God directed his footsteps and he met a man who spoke to him of Christians, and of their belief in life beyond the grave. This so stirred the young Clement that he immediately moved from Rome to Judea so that there, in the cradle of the Christian Faith itself, he might come to uncontested knowledge regarding life beyond the grave. When he heard the preaching of the Apostle Peter, based entirely on Christ's Resurrection from the dead, Clement despised the conjectures of philosophy and sincerely adopted the Christian Faith. He was baptized, and dedicated himself totally to the service of the Church of God. As it was then, so it is today-he who has a strong faith in the resurrected Christ, and a clear knowledge of life beyond death and judgment, easily decides to pay the price for entry into that life; that is, the fulfilling of all God's commandments.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (**Genesis 2**):

1. How the Lord God created man, and woman from man;
2. How Adam and Eve were naked and were not ashamed, for they did not yet know sin.

HOMILY

-on the purpose of the apportionment of gifts, ministries and callings-

... For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

This is why the Holy Spirit apportioned the gifts, and made some apostles, others prophets, others evangelists, and others pastors and teachers: that **the saints**, the faithful Christians, become perfected. As in a household, honor and service are apportioned, and there is honor and service appropriate to parents, honor and service appropriate to adult sons and daughters, and honor and service appropriate to young children and servants-yet all serve together for the benefit of one another; so it is in God's house, the Holy Church: with every honor is a corresponding service, and the services of each are beneficial to all. Thus **the body of Christ**, God's Holy Church, is gradually and wisely built. Each of the faithful, assisted by the others, grows and develops as a member of this body; grows and develops in holiness and purity, and in a corresponding measure and proportion to the whole great body. The whole body, from the beginning to the end of time-especially from the Incarnation of God the Word on earth until the Dread Judgment-is the Holy Church of God. The body is worthy of immortality, the building is worthy of God. The eye of man cannot see it from end to end, nor can the mind of man comprehend it. The building is of chosen materials: living stones, eyes and hearts, without roughness or ugliness, without corruption or change. Everything is in its place, everything is most beautiful in its entirety and in its parts. Here, brethren, is the goal of our journey! Here is the meaning of our burning in the furnace of suffering! Here is our life, better than all our plans and lovelier than all our desires.

O Lord Jesus, our man-loving Lord, do not cast us away as inferior material, but polish us and build us into Thine immortal body.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR JAMES THE PERSIAN

James was born of Christian parents in the Persian city of Elapa (or Vilat), brought up in the Christian Faith and married to a Christian woman. The Persian King Yezdegerd took a liking to James for his talents and skillfulness, and made him a noble at his court. Flattered by the king, James was deluded and began offering sacrifices to the idols that the king worshiped. His mother and wife learned of this, and wrote him a letter of reproach in which they grieved over him as an apostate and one who was spiritually dead. Yet, at the end of the letter, they begged him to repent and return to Christ. Moved by this letter, James repented bitterly, and courageously confessed his faith in Christ the Lord to the king. Angered, the king condemned him to death by a special torture: his entire body was to be cut up, piece by piece, until he breathed his last. The executioners fulfilled this command of the wicked king to the letter, and cut off James's fingers, then his toes, his legs and arms, his shoulders, and finally his head. During every cutting, the repentant martyr gave thanks to God. A sweet-smelling fragrance, as of a cypress, emanated from the wounds. Thus, this wonderful man repented of his sin and presented his soul to Christ his God in the Kingdom of Heaven. James suffered in about the year 400. His head is to be found in Rome and a part of his relics in Portugal, where he is commemorated on May 22.

2. THE SEVENTEEN VENERABLE MARTYRS OF INDIA

They were Christian monks who suffered at the hands of the Indian King Abenner. Enraged at Elder Barlaam because he baptized his son, Ioasaph, King Abenner sent men in pursuit of him. The pursuers did not capture Barlaam, but captured seventeen other monks and brought them to the king. The king condemned them to death and his men plucked out their eyes, severed their tongues, broke their arms and legs, and then beheaded them. Even so, the Christian Faith in the Kingdom of India was strengthened all the more by the blood of these knights of Christ.

3. THE VENERABLE ROMANUS THE WONDERWORKER

Romanus lived a life of asceticism in the vicinity of Antioch. He never kindled a fire or lit a candle in his cell. He reposed peacefully, and was a miracle-worker both during his life and after his death. He intercedes for barren women when they offer prayer to him.

4. THE VENERABLE PINUPHRIUS

Pinuphrius was a contemporary of St. John Cassian (February 29) and a great Egyptian ascetic. He lived in the fourth century and carried out his life of asceticism in various places, always fleeing the praise of men. He had many disciples, who strove to imitate the lofty example of their teacher.

5. THE VENERABLE NATHANIEL

Nathaniel was a Nitrian monk. He prayed to God both day and night, and was enlightened by the contemplation of divine matters. He neither left his cell nor even crossed the threshold for a full thirty-eight years. He entered into rest in the Lord in the second half of the sixth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR JAMES THE PERSIAN

The Creator does not lose repentant souls:
He loves a true penitent the most.
James denied Christ the Living God
For the sake of the godless emperor, his flatterer.
His mother reproached him as did his wife:
"All the riches of the earth are as transient as foam."
James repented, and bitterly repented,
Then openly spoke about what he had kept secret:
"A Christian I was, and again I am a Christian:
Foolish and weak are your idols!"
This James said, as he stood before the emperor;
This he said openly and remained true to it.
The emperor took all his imperial gifts from him,
And clothed the wondrous James with torture.
James was reddened with wounds and blood,
And like eagles on a carcass, men attacked him!
They dismembered the body of Christ's hero,
And cut St. James into bits.
Now James prays before God in Paradise
That all Christians overcome all attacks.

REFLECTION

When the executioners severed the thumb of St. James's right hand, he said: "Even a vine is pruned in this manner, so that in time a young branch may grow." At the severing of his second finger, he said: "Receive also, O Lord, the second branch of Thy sowing." At the severing of his third finger, he said: "I bless the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." At the severing of his fourth finger, he said: "O Thou who acceptest the praise of the four beasts [symbols of the four evangelists], accept the suffering of the fourth finger." At the severing of the fifth finger, he said: "May my rejoicing be fulfilled as that of the five wise virgins at the wedding feast." During the severing of the sixth finger, he said: "Thanks be to Thee, O Lord, Who at the sixth hour stretched out Thy most pure arms on the Cross, that Thou hast made me worthy to offer Thee my sixth finger." At the severing of the seventh finger, he said: "Like David who praised Thee seven times daily, I praise Thee through the seventh finger severed for Thy sake." At the severing of the eighth finger, he said: "On the eighth day Thou Thyself, O Lord, wast circumcised." At the severing of the ninth finger, he said: "At the ninth hour, Thou didst commend Thy spirit into the hands of Thy Father, O my Christ, and I offer Thee thanks during the suffering of my ninth finger." At the severing of the tenth finger, he said: "On a ten-stringed harp I sing to Thee, O God, and thank Thee that Thou hast made me worthy to endure the severing of the ten fingers of my two hands, for the Ten Commandments written on two tablets." Oh, what wonderful faith and love! Oh, the noble soul of this knight of Christ!

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wonderful Paradise of God (**Genesis 2**):

1. How most beautiful was Paradise, both within and without;
2. How all living things in Paradise were unconditionally submissive to man and man to God;
3. How most beautiful were the first man and woman in Paradise, conscious of God's presence and of God's authority.

HOMILY

-on the perfect man-

... Till we all come in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

The unity of the Faith, brethren, and the knowledge of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ the Savior, unites two men into one man, a thousand people into one man, and many millions of people into one man. The unity of Faith in Christ the Lord, and the true Orthodox knowledge of Christ the Lord, unites men more strongly than blood, more strongly than language, more strongly than all external circumstances and material bonds. When many souls think as one and the same, will as one and the same, and desire as one and the same, then these many souls are as one soul, one great and mighty soul. Physical differences in this case mean little, and are hardly to be taken into consideration. Thus, the same souls are built up into **a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ**. The parts of the perfect whole are themselves perfect. Every Christian soul is a part of the **perfect man**. Christ is the Perfect Man of Whom the Church is the Mystical Body. He fills everyone who believes in Him with Himself, according to the **measure of the stature of each**. He is the fullness beyond all fullness, the living fount that flows and fills every worthy space. Inasmuch as a man empties himself of everything that is not of Christ, Christ will enter into him and fill him accordingly.

O my brethren, deep humility is needed in addition to strong faith, so that the Living Water may be poured into us. Even in nature, we see that water easily irrigates the lowlands. So, the more lowly our humiliation is before the Lord Jesus, the more willingly He pours Himself into us, irrigates us with His life-giving Self, and fills us as His vessel with the fullness of His immortality.

O Lord Jesus, Thou fullness of life, wisdom, beauty and sweetness, help us to humble ourselves before Thy Divine Majesty, that we may be made worthy of Thy visitation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYR STEPHEN THE NEW

As at one time Hannah, the mother of Samuel, prayed to God to give her a son, so did Anna, the mother of Stephen. Praying thus in the Church of Blachernae before the icon of the Most-holy Theotokos, a light sleep overcame her, and she saw the Most-holy Virgin as radiant as the sun, and heard a voice from the icon: "Woman, depart in peace. In accordance with your prayer, you have a son in your womb." Anna indeed conceived and gave birth to a son, the holy Stephen. At sixteen, Stephen received the monastic tonsure on Mount Auxentius near Constantinople, from the elder John who also taught him divine wisdom and asceticism. When John entered into rest in the Lord, Stephen remained on the mountain in a life of strict asceticism, taking upon himself labor upon labor. His holiness attracted many disciples to him. When Emperor Constantine Copronymus was persecuting icons more ferociously than his foul father, Leo the Isaurian, Stephen showed himself a zealous defender of the veneration of holy icons. The demented emperor accepted various obscene slanders against Stephen and personally plotted intrigues to break Stephen and get him out of the way. Stephen was banished to the island of Proconnesus, then taken to Constantinople, chained and cast into prison, where he was met by 342 monks, brought from all over and imprisoned for their veneration of the icons. There, in prison, they carried out the whole church typicon as in a monastery. Then the wicked emperor condemned Stephen to death. The saint foresaw his death forty days in advance, and asked forgiveness of the brethren. The emperor's servants dragged him from prison and, beating and pulling him, dragged him through the streets of Constantinople calling upon all those loyal to the emperor to stone this "enemy of the emperor." One of the heretics struck the saint on the head with a piece of wood, and the saint gave up his soul. As St. Stephen the Protomartyr suffered at the hands of the Jews, so this Stephen suffered at the hands of the iconoclastic heretics. This glorious soldier of Christ suffered in the year 767 at the age of fifty-three, and was crowned with unfading glory.

2. THE NEW MARTYR CHRISTOS

Christos was an Albanian Christian living in Constantinople and a gardener by trade. As he was selling his vegetables one day, he offended a Turk, who then slandered him before a judge, saying that Christos had promised to become a Moslem and then recanted. After interrogation, he was chained and cast into prison. In prison, someone offered him food, which Christos refused, saying: "It is better that I appear before my Christ hungry." After that, he pulled out some money he had concealed under his belt and gave it to one of his fellow prisoners, requesting that the money be used for several Liturgies to be celebrated for his soul. He was beheaded by the Turks in the year 1748, and was glorified forever in the Kingdom of Christ God.

3. THE VENERABLE ANNA

Anna was a woman of noble birth who, after her husband's death, was tonsured into monasticism by St. Stephen the New. Emperor Constantine Copronymus urged her to say that she had engaged in illicit physical relations with St. Stephen, in order to humiliate him before the people. However, this holy woman refused to join in the emperor's intrigue against the saint, whom she venerated as her spiritual father. For that, she was whipped and then cast into prison, where she gave up her holy soul to God.

4. THE HOLY AND DEVOUT EMPEROR MAURICE

Maurice was murdered with his six sons by Emperor Phocas in the year 602 (see "Reflection" below).

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE MARTYR STEPHEN THE NEW

Of the same name as the first Stephen,
Stephen the New gave his life in battle, too.
The proud heretical emperor, coarse power incarnate,
Was armed to the teeth with earthly weapons.
Stephen's weapon was power not of a physical source,
A spiritual weapon, heavenly truth.
The emperor had soldiers, defenders of falsehood,
While Stephen was set at ease by the invisible God.
Serene as heaven, Stephen awaited torture,
Death and eternal life beyond this age.
While in his rage, the emperor roared
And signed the order for death and torment for the righteous man.
Stephen was not dismayed, though beaten and pressed,
Bound as he was by spirit and prayer to the heavens.
The emperor, stronger than the saint's body, crushed his body;
Yet the saint was stronger in spirit, and finished in victory.
O Saint Stephen, spiritual knight,
Help us avoid the nets of the devil,
And to venerate the holy icons with honor,
And that we might always follow your wondrous example.

REFLECTION

Reading the examples of perseverance in the Faith and generosity of the saints of God, we also become persevering in the Faith and generous. When Copronymus's men urged St. Stephen to reject the veneration of icons to please the iconoclastic emperor, Stephen extended his hand, clenched his fist and said: "If I had in myself only a fist full of blood, I would shed it for the icon of Christ."

Emperor Maurice had six sons of which the sixth and youngest was not yet weaned. For this youngest son, the emperor kept a special wet-nurse at court who fed it. A terrible fate came upon Emperor Maurice: Phocas ousted him from the throne and condemned him to death together with all of his six sons. Before Maurice's eyes, his sons were slain, one after the other. When the wet-nurse had to hand over the emperor's sixth son to be slain, she genuinely felt sorrow over the fate of the unfortunate emperor and his children, and in a moment, decided to save the life of at least one of the emperor's sons. So, when they sought the emperor's son from her breast, she gave them her own young son and he was beheaded. Finally, the Emperor Maurice was beheaded. The emperor's youngest son grew up believing his wet-nurse to be his mother. However, when the wet-nurse revealed the secret to him, he became very serious, then resolutely left the world and withdrew to Mount Sinai, where he was tonsured a monk and dedicated himself to God. He did this to requite that innocent young child who was put to death in his place.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's wonderful Paradise (**Genesis 2**):

1. How it was a kingdom of innocence, purity and righteousness;
2. How there was not a trace of sickness or death, for there was not even a thought of sin.

HOMILY

-on how the faithful must grow-

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

Brethren, here is all that is asked of us on this earthly journey: that we hold to the truth and that we live in love. Truth is revealed by Christ the Lord, and the example of love is given in Christ the Lord. Neither can one come to the truth apart from Christ the Lord nor find an example of true love apart from Him. Seeing this only true path to light and salvation in the confusion of many false paths, the Apostle Paul reminds us beforehand: **That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14).** Only God can reveal the truth; only God can show true love. One man can know more than another man, but only God can reveal the truth. Thoughts come to man like the wind, and illusions can seem to be truth to him. Deluded by his own thoughts, one man deludes another; deceived by illusions, one man then deceives another; but truth is in God and of God. Brethren, Christ is our whole truth and our whole love. When we think of Christ, we think of truth; when we act according to Christ, we act correctly; when we love Christ, we love Love itself. By Christ we live, by Christ we grow, by Christ we become immortal and are glorified. He is our Head-not merely the titular head of a group, but the actual head of a living body, of which we are members. Adhering to truth and love, we are made worthy to dwell eternally in this Body of Christ.

O Lord Christ, our most wonderful truth and our endearing love, enter into us and receive us into Thyself.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

NOVEMBER - 29 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR PARAMON AND 370 OTHERS WITH HIM

In Asian Bithynia, Governor Aquilinus fiercely persecuted Christians. Once, he captured 370 Christians, brought them with him, and bound them at a place where there was an idolatrous temple of the god Poseidon. Here, the wicked governor tried to force them to worship and offer sacrifice to the idol. Even though the governor threatened death for anyone who did not obey his order, not a single Christian submitted. Just then, a respected man by the name of Paramon passed along the road beside the temple. He stopped beside the masses of shackled people and learned what was happening. Then he cried out: "Oh, how many innocent righteous ones does this foul governor desire to slaughter, because they will not worship his dead and mute idols?" Paramon then continued on his way, and the infuriated governor sent his servants to slay him. The servants caught up to Paramon, seized him and pierced his tongue with a thorn, then stripped him naked and stabbed his entire body. Holy Paramon, with prayer in his heart, gave up his soul to God. After that, the 370 martyrs, great as sons of God and innocent as lambs, were beheaded and thus entered into the Immortal Kingdom of Christ the Lord. They suffered in the year 250.

2. THE VENERABLE ACACIUS OF SINAI

In his famous book, **The Ladder**, St. John Climacus relates the life of this saint. The young Acacius was a novice under an evil elder in the monastery on Sinai. The irascible elder daily reproached and insulted Acacius and often beat, tormented and maltreated him in every possible way. However, Acacius did not complain but endured this all patiently, with the assurance that it was beneficial for his salvation. Whenever anyone asked him how he was doing, he replied: "Well, as before the Lord God!" After nine years of obedience and torment, Acacius died. The elder buried him and then expressed sorrow to another elder saying: "Acacius, my disciple died." "I do not believe it," replied the holy elder, "Acacius did not die." Then both of them went to the grave of the dead man and that holy elder cried out: "Brother Acacius, did you die?" Acacius, obedient even after death replied: "Father, I have not died, for it is impossible for an obedient one to die." Then, the evil elder repented and shut himself in a cell near Acacius's grave where, in repentance and prayer, he spent the remainder of his life.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR DIONYSIUS, BISHOP OF CORINTH

He was an eminent pastor and teacher. He was beheaded for Christ in the year 182.

4. SAINT TIRIDATES, KING OF ARMENIA

Tiridates was a contemporary of Diocletian. At first, he furiously persecuted Christians, but God's punishment befell him and he went insane and became like a beast, as had happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Tiridates was miraculously healed of his insanity by St. Gregory of Armenia (September 30). From then until his death, Tiridates spent his life in repentance and devotion. He died peacefully in the fourth century.

5. THE HOLY MARTYR APOLLONIUS

Apollonius was a Roman senator. Accused because of his faith in Christ, he confessed it before the entire senate, for which he was beheaded with the sword in Rome in the year 186.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE ACACIUS OF SINAI

The elder summoned his novice:
"Brother Acacius, where are you?"
The elder called once more:
"Acacius, are you dead?"

"No, Father, I am not dead,"
The monk humbly replied,
"For him who faithfully obeys,
There is no death."

The irascible elder was amazed,
Amazed, and began to weep.
The elder bitterly wept,
And repented of his wickedness.

Why does the cruel elder repent?
Truly, he has a reason.
Into the wilderness, the sinner went
To atone for his evil.
Acacius, the wondrous monk,
By obedience, saved his soul;
And his soul now rejoices,
And his name is glorified.

REFLECTION

God's punishment often befalls sinners immediately after the sin, that the sinners may fear and the righteous be encouraged. However, sometimes it falls much later, suddenly and unexpectedly, that sinners may know that God forgets nothing. Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up by the earth immediately after their sin, but King Balthazar saw the hand that wrote his death sentence when he felt most fortunate at a banquet among his friends and admirers.

A gravely ill soldier was brought to St. Stephen the New to be healed by him through prayer. Stephen told him to venerate the icons of Christ and the Holy Theotokos. The soldier did this and was immediately restored to health, and this miracle was spoken of everywhere. Hearing of this, the iconoclastic Emperor Constantine Copronymus summoned this soldier and questioned him. When the soldier confessed that he received healing from the holy icons, the emperor reproached him with fury for venerating them. The frightened soldier repudiated the veneration of icons before the emperor and grew ashamed of his faith in them. When the soldier left the court and mounted his horse, the horse went wild under him, threw him off and trampled him with its hooves until he gave up his soul. Behold: a punishment immediately following sin.

King Tiridates, a persecutor of Christians, threw St. Gregory into a pit and killed thirty-seven holy nuns, but no punishment befell him. Later, when the king and his companions went hunting for pleasure, he and his entourage were seized by sudden madness. The reason for his madness and the means to restore him were revealed to his pious sister in a dream. St. Gregory was taken out of the pit, and by his prayers King Tiridates became healthy, repented and was baptized.

Punishment sometimes quickly follows sin as the day follows the night, yet sometimes slowly, as year follows year. But it never fails to come, except where repentance takes the place of punishment.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's wonderful Paradise (**Genesis 2**):

1. How God adorned Paradise with every kind of tree pleasant to the sight and good for food;
2. How God planted the Tree of Life in the midst of Paradise;
3. How God only forbade Adam to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

HOMILY

-on the Church's compact structure, similar to a body-

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part (Ephesians 4:16).

This word, brethren, is on the spiritual body, God's holy Church. From Him, that is, from Christ, **the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted**. The most wise Apostle cannot find a better comparison for the Church than the human body. What the head is to the human body, so is Christ the Lord to the body of the Church. From the head, the nerves spread through all parts of the body, and through the nerves, all the parts of the body perceive, feel and move; and their life lies in this perception, feeling and movement. It can be said that the head, through the brain and the nerves, is present in every part of the body. If the head is cut off, every part of the body becomes dead in an instant. Christ is present in every part of the Church, in every faithful member of it. Through Him, each of the faithful perceives the spiritual kingdom, feels love and moves aright toward God. From Him, every member receives strength **according to the effectual working in the measure**, that is, according to function and gift. The Lord gives this strength directly, by contact, by touch, by His personal presence. Love is a wonderful bond that binds Christ to the faithful, the faithful to Christ and the faithful to one another. Brethren, what happens to one part of the body when it is torn away from the nerves that link it to the head? It becomes inactive, insensitive and motionless: dead. This also happens with every member of the Church who leaves the structure of the Church, and thus severs his tie with the Head of the Church. Brethren, may God preserve us from this calamity!

O Lord Jesus, the Source of life and love, do not allow any dark power, within us or without us, to separate us from Thee and Thy Body, Thy Holy Church that Thou hast purchased with Thy precious blood.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY APOSTLE ANDREW THE FIRST-CALLED

Andrew, the son of Jonah and brother of Peter, was born in Bethsaida and was a fisherman by trade. At first he was a disciple of St. John the Baptist, but when St. John pointed to the Lord Jesus, saying, **Behold the Lamb of God! (John 1:36)**, Andrew left his first teacher and followed Christ. Then, Andrew brought his brother Peter to the Lord. Following the descent of the Holy Spirit, it fell by lot to the first apostle of Christ, St. Andrew, to preach the Gospel in Byzantium and Thrace, then in the lands along the Danube and in Russia around the Black Sea, and finally in Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, where he suffered. In Byzantium, he appointed St. Stachys as its first bishop; in Kiev, he planted a Cross on a high place and prophesied a bright Christian future for the Russian people; throughout Thrace, Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, he converted multitudes of people to the Faith and ordained bishops and priests for them. In the city of Patras, he performed many miracles in the name of Christ, and won many over to the Lord. Among the new faithful were the brother and wife of the Proconsul Aegeates. Angered at this, Aegeates subjected St. Andrew to torture and then crucified him. While the apostle of Christ was still alive on the cross, he gave beneficial instructions to the Christians who had gathered around. The people wanted to take him down from the cross but he refused to let them. Then the apostle prayed to God and an extraordinary light encompassed him. This brilliant illumination lasted for half an hour, and when it disappeared, the apostle gave up his holy soul to God. Thus, the First-called Apostle, the first of the Twelve Great Apostles to know the Lord and follow Him, finished his earthly course. St. Andrew suffered for his Lord in the year 62. His relics were taken to Constantinople; his head was later taken to Rome, and one hand was taken to Moscow.

2. SAINT FRUMENTIUS THE ENLIGHTENER OF ABYSSINIA

In the time of Emperor Constantine the Great, a learned man from Tyre by the name of Meropius traveled to India. He took with him two young Christians, the brothers Edesius and Frumentius. On the journey, their boat was shipwrecked in a storm off the coast of Abyssinia, and the wild Abyssinians killed everyone on the boat except these two brothers. They lived in Abyssinia for several years, and managed to enter into service in the imperial court of the Abyssinian king. Frumentius began to preach the Christian Faith, initially very cautiously, and was convinced that this land would be fruitful for such preaching. The two brothers then took ship: Edesius to Tyre, to his parents, and Frumentius to Alexandria, to Patriarch Athanasius the Great. Frumentius explained the situation in Abyssinia to the Patriarch, and sought pastors for those newly converted to the Faith. St. Athanasius consecrated Frumentius to the episcopacy. St. Frumentius returned to Abyssinia where, by his zeal and his miracles, he converted all of Abyssinia to the Christian Faith in his own lifetime. This great shepherd of the flock of Christ, the enlightener of Abyssinia, reposed peacefully in the year 370 and went to live in the Kingdom of his Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY APOSTLE ANDREW THE FIRST-CALLED

St. Andrew, by the Spirit enlightened,
And the First-called Apostle of Christ,
Proclaimed the Lord day after day,
And baptized the people with the Cross.
Like a gardener in his own garden,
Through village and town he walked,
And skillfully grafted wild trees,
Watering them with Living Water,
Until he came to the end of his days,
And saw the Cross awaiting him.
Joyful Andrew said to the Cross:
"Greetings, O Cross! God sanctified thee,
Christ sanctified thee with His body.
O Cross, be thou my resting place.
From the dust of the earth, take me;
To God in the highest, raise me up,
And let Christ take me from thee-
The very Christ Who, because of me,
was crucified on thee."
Disciple of the holy Baptist,
And apostle of Christ the Savior
O Andrew, first-called star,
By your prayers, help us.

REFLECTION

St. John Chrysostom says: "All is given to the Apostles." That is, all gifts, all power, all the fullness of grace which God gives to the faithful. We see this in the life of the great apostle, St. Andrew the First-called: He was an apostle, evangelist, prophet, pastor and teacher (**Ephesians 4:11**). As an evangelist, he carried the good news of the Gospel to the four corners of the earth; as a prophet, he prophesied the baptism of the Russian people and the greatness of Kiev as a city and a Christian center; as a pastor, he established and organized many churches; as a teacher, he tirelessly taught people right up to and during his crucifixion, when he taught from the cross until his last breath. In addition to this, he was a martyr, which is also according to the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is not given to everyone. And so we see in this apostle, as in the others, the fullness of the grace of the Spirit of God. And every great work that a follower of Christ performs must be ascribed to that grace. St. Frumentius testifies this to us. When he returned from Alexandria to Abyssinia as a consecrated bishop, he began to perform the greatest miracles, thus converting great masses of people to the Faith. Then the amazed king asked him: "So many years have you lived among us and never have we seen you perform such miracles. How is it that you do so now?" To this, the Blessed Frumentius replied to the emperor: "This is not my work, but the work of the grace of the priesthood." The saint then explained to the king how he had forsaken parents and marriage and the whole world for the sake of Christ, and how he had-by the laying on of hands by St. Athanasius-received the grace of the priesthood: miracle-working grace.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the spiritual fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How the serpent provoked greed and pride in Eve;
2. How the greedy and proud woman transgressed God's command and ate of the Tree of Knowledge;
3. How Eve sinned, not in the midst of poverty or need, but in an abundance of all things.

HOMILY

-on the ignorance and hardheartedness of the pagans-

The gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart (Ephesians 4:17-18).

What is vanity, my brethren? All that is seen outside God, cut off from God and done without the fear of God. What is vanity of the mind, my brethren? To live and interpret life, not by God's law but rather by one's own passing thoughts and desires. Whence, my brethren, does this evil come to men? From hardness of heart and from inner ignorance. What does hardness of heart mean, brethren? It means a heart empty of love for God and fear of God, and filled with lustfulness and fear of everything for the body's sake. Brethren, what is born of hardness of heart? Ignorance-complete ignorance of divine things, divine ways and divine laws; a heart completely dulled to spiritual life and spiritual thought. What is the final consequence, brethren, of hardness of heart and ignorance of divine truth? A darkened understanding and alienation from the Living God. Darkened understanding occurs when the mind of man becomes as darkened as the body, and the light that is in man becomes darkness. Oh, such a darkness! A darkened understanding is a darkened mind. A darkened mind knows the meaning of nothing, or denies the meaning of everything. In such a condition, a man is alienated from the life of God, and he withers and dies like a body part cut off from the body. Such are the pagans, such are the godless, and such are those of little faith or false Christians. But even dry wood, when it is watered with the life-creating water of Christ, comes to life and bursts forth in greenery. Even the dried-up pagan world was raised up and brought to life by Christ the Lord. How much more so would it be for repentant Christian sinners!

Let us look at ourselves, my brethren. Let us do so every day. Let us ask ourselves every day whether we have become darkened and alienated from the life of God because of our vanity. Soon there will be death, the end and judgment. The dry wood will be cast into the unquenchable fire.

O Lord Jesus, our Mind and our Life, help us to think with Thee, and to live with Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER

DECEMBER - 1 -

1. THE HOLY PROPHET NAHUM

Nahum was born of the tribe of Simeon in a place called Elkosh on the far side of the Jordan. He lived about seven hundred years before Christ and prophesied the destruction of Nineveh about two hundred years after the Prophet Jonah. Because of Jonah's preaching, the Ninevites had repented, and God had spared them and not destroyed them. In time, however, they forgot God's mercy and again became corrupt. The Prophet Nahum prophesied their destruction, and since there was no repentance, God did not spare them. The entire city was destroyed by earthquake, flood and fire, so that its location is no longer known. St. Nahum lived for forty-five years and entered into rest in the Lord, leaving us a small book of his true prophecies.

2. SAINT PHILARET THE ALMSGIVER

Philaret was from the village of Amnia in Paphlagonia. Early in life, Philaret was a very wealthy man, but by distributing abundant alms to the poor he himself became extremely poor. However, he was not afraid of poverty, and, not heeding the complaints of his wife and children, he continued his charitable works with hope in God, Who said: **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7).** Once, while he was plowing in the field, a man came to him and complained that one of his oxen had died in the harness and that he was unable to plow with only one ox. Philaret then unharnessed one of his oxen and gave it to him. He even gave his remaining horse to a man who was summoned to go to war. He gave away the calf of his last cow, and when he saw how the cow pined for her missing calf, and the calf for the cow, he called the man and gave him the cow too. And thus the aged Philaret was left without food in an empty house. But he prayed to God and placed his hope in Him. And God did not abandon the righteous one to be put to shame in his hope. At that time the Empress Irene reigned with her young son, Constantine. According to the custom of that time, the empress sent men throughout the whole empire to seek the best and most distinguished maiden to whom she could wed her son, the emperor. By God's providence, these men happened to stay overnight in Philaret's house, and they saw his most beautiful and modest granddaughter Maria, the daughter of his daughter Hypatia, and took her to Constantinople. The emperor was well pleased with her, married her, and moved Philaret and all his family to the capital, giving him great honors and riches. Philaret did not become proud as a result of this unexpected good fortune, but, thankful to God, he continued to perform good works even more than he had before, and thus he continued until his death. At the age of ninety he summoned his children, blessed them, and instructed them to cleave to God and to God's law, and with his clairvoyant spirit he prophesied to all of them how they would live out this life, as once had Jacob. After that he went to the Rodolfia Monastery and gave up his soul to God. At his death his face shone like the sun, and after his death an unusual, sweet fragrance came forth from his body and miracles took place at his relics. This righteous man entered into rest in the year 797. His wife, Theosevia, and all his children and grandchildren lived a God-pleasing life and reposed in the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT PHILARET THE ALMSGIVER

To the merciful one, God shows mercy;
He never ceases to show mercy.
He hears the prayers of the merciful;
He gives gifts a hundredfold.

Philaret the Merciful
Placed himself wholly in God's hands.
By his compassion, he amazed the world;
He was faithful to God, even in suffering.

Philaret did not compete
For honor or precedence.
We use this age to purchase
The Eternal Kingdom and blessedness.

The Lord spoke a wondrous word:
"Trade until I return!
When the time is right,
I will repay you with great riches."

When Philaret became impoverished
Because of almsgiving beyond measure,
Because of truth and goodness-
God visited him from on high:

Visited him and bestowed mercy,
Bestowed mercy and rewarded him,
Just as once upon the faithful Job,
He bestowed mercy and a reward.

REFLECTION

Virtue is like a thirst. When a man begins to drink of it, he becomes more thirsty and seeks to drink of it all the more. He who begins to exercise the virtue of compassion knows no measure and acknowledges no limit. St. Philaret was no less generous when he was impoverished than when he was wealthy. When his granddaughter became empress, he became a rich man once again, but no less generous. One day, he told his wife and children to prepare the best feast that they could and said: "Let us invite our King and Lord, with all His noblemen, to come to the feast." Everyone thought that the old man was thinking of inviting to dinner his son-in-law, the emperor, and they all worked as hard as they could and prepared the feast. Meanwhile, Philaret went around the streets and gathered all the needy, the beggars, the blind, the outcasts, the lame and the infirm, and brought them to the feast. Placing them at the table, he ordered his wife and sons to serve at the table. After the feast was completed, he put a gold coin in the hand of each guest and dismissed them. Then everyone understood that by "the King" he meant the Lord Christ Himself, and by "the noblemen" he meant beggars and those in need. He also said that one need not look at the money that one gives to beggars, but rather one should mix up the money in one's pocket and give only what the hand removes from the pocket. The hand will draw out whatever God's providence ordains.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How Eve, when she sinned, did not repent but hurried to make her husband a participant in her sin;
2. How Adam, when he sinned, did not repent but justified himself, blaming his wife before God;
3. How, even today, many sinners seek fellow participants in their sin and justify themselves by blaming others.

HOMILY

-on the creation of the world-

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

Brethren, this is God's answer through the mouth of the prophet, the answer to the question that we all thirst to know: "Whence comes this world?" God hears our question, spoken or unspoken; He hears and gives an answer. Just as He gives rain to the dry earth, just as He gives health to a sick person, just as He gives bread and clothing to the body, so also does He give an answer to our spirit. He gives an answer to the question that has caused it hunger and thirst, pain and nakedness, until it (the spirit) is nourished and quenched, restored to health, and is clothed with the true answer. This is the question: "Whence, therefore, comes this world?" This is the answer: **In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.** This world is not of itself, just as nothing in this world is of itself, neither is this world of an evil power, neither is this world of many creators, good and evil, but rather it is of the one gracious God. This answer evokes joy in the heart of every man and incites him to good works. And by this we know, among other things, that this is the only correct and true answer. Every other answer, in contradiction to this, evokes sorrow and fear in us and incites us to evil works, and therefore we know, among other things, that such answers are false. Brethren, the world is from God-let us rejoice and be glad! The world is of divine origin, and consequently its end will also be in God. The world is of a good root, and consequently it will bring forth good fruit. It proceeded from the chamber of light, and it will end in light. When we know that the beginning is good, then we know that it tends toward good and that the end will be good. Behold, in these words about the beginning, the prophecy about the end is already hidden. As was the beginning, so also will be the end. He from Whom the beginning came, in Him also is the end. Therefore, let us hold fast to this saving truth, that we may have shining hope and be strengthened in love toward the One Who, out of love, created us.

O Lord God, our Almighty Creator, One God, One Creator, the good Source of goodness, Thee do we worship, to Thee do we pray; direct us to the good end by Thy Holy Spirit, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 2 -

1. THE HOLY PROPHET HABAKKUK

Habakkuk was the son of Asaphat from the tribe of Simeon. He prophesied six hundred years before Christ, during the time of King Manasseh, and foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. When Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, Habakkuk sought refuge in the land of the Ishmaelites. From there he returned to Judea, where he lived as a farmer. One day he was carrying lunch to the workers in the fields, when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: **Go carry the dinner that thou hast into Babylon unto Daniel, who is in the lion's den (Daniel 14:34).** But Habakkuk responded: **Lord, I never saw Babylon; neither do I know where the den is (Daniel 14:34-35).** Then the angel took him by the hair and instantly brought him to Babylon, over an immense distance, to the lion's den, where Daniel had been cast by King Cyrus as a punishment for not worshiping the idols. **O Daniel, Daniel, cried Habakkuk, take the dinner which God hath sent thee (Daniel 14:37),** and Daniel took it and ate. Then the angel of God again took Habakkuk and carried him back to his field in Judea. Habakkuk also prophesied the liberation of Jerusalem and the time of the coming of Christ. He entered into rest in ripe old age and was buried at Kela. His relics were discovered during the reign of Theodosius the Great.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR MYROPE

Myrope was born in Ephesus of Christian parents. After the death of her father, she moved with her mother to the island of Chios, where she suffered for Christ. The suffering of this holy virgin took place soon after the suffering and death of the glorious Martyr Isidore the soldier (May 14). When the torturers had beheaded Isidore, the courageous Myrope secretly took his body, censed it, and honorably buried it in a special place. The villainous prince Numerian heard that the martyr's body had been stolen and wanted to kill the guards. Learning that innocent men would suffer for her good deed, blessed Myrope appeared before the authorities and acknowledged that she had taken the martyr's body and buried it. By order of the prince, the entire body of Christ's holy virgin was severely whipped, and finally she was cast into prison covered with wounds. But the Lord did not leave His martyr comfortless. At midnight a heavenly light illumined the prison, and many angels, with St. Isidore in their midst, appeared to her. "Peace be to you, Myrope," St. Isidore said to her. "Your prayer has reached God, and soon you will be with us and will receive the wreath prepared for you." The holy martyr rejoiced and at that moment surrendered her soul to her God. A sweet fragrance issued from her body, filling the entire prison. One of the guards, seeing all of this and sensing the fragrance, believed in Christ, was baptized, and soon received a martyr's death. St. Myrope took up her habitation in eternity in the year 251.

3. SAINT UROSH, KING OF SERBIA

Urosh was the son of Tsar Dushan. He reigned during the difficult time of the collapse of the Serbian kingdom. Meek, devout and gentle, he did not want to subjugate the unrestrained nobles by force, among whom the most violent was Vukashin, who ended the good king's life. The good Urosh suffered a martyr's death on December 2, 1367, at the age of thirty-one. Slain by men, he was glorified by God. His miracle-working relics rested in the Jazak Monastery in Frushka Gora, whence they were translated to Belgrade during the Second World War. They were placed in the Cathedral Church alongside the relics of Prince Lazar and the Despot Stefan Shtiljanovich. During the reign of this good king, the Monastery of St. Nahum beside Lake Ohrid was built by Grgur, one of Urosh's nobles.

4. THE VENERABLE ATHANASIUS, RECLUSE OF THE MONASTERY OF THE KIEV CAVES

This holy man died after a long life of asceticism and was bathed, clothed and prepared for burial by his brethren. Athanasius lay dead for two days and suddenly came to life. When they came to bury him, they found him sitting up and crying. After that, he closed himself in his cell and lived for twelve more years on bread and water, not speaking a word to anyone. He entered into rest in the Lord in the year 1176.

5. SAINT ISE [JESSE], BISHOP OF TSILKANI

Ise is one of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers (May 7). He was a great miracle-worker. By his prayers, he re-routed a distant river to flow close to the city of Tsilkani. His relics rest in a church dedicated to him in Tsilkani in Georgia.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT UROSH, KING OF SERBIA

Like the wind, Dushan's power passed away,
But Urosh's holiness forever remains.
Weak in tyranny, powerful in virtue;
Powerful in virtue, righteousness and truth;
Urosh, with all his heart, fell in love with Christ God,
Gaining heaven and losing the world.
No sin tainted his soul.
Defeated, he conquered; slain, he lives.
All the Serbian nobles, proud and hot-tempered,
While living could not do
That which now the relics of St. Urosh do-
Urosh the Powerful, the God-pleaser.
Rich men, turned to dust, no longer reign,
But the crowned Urosh, rich in justice and God's truth,
Even now reigns,
And eases the pains of his people,
Offering up prayers before Christ in Paradise,
Imploring mercy for his people from the Lord.
O King Urosh, holy and noble one,
Help us to fulfill God's law!

REFLECTION

“Who has ever returned from the other world to inform us of it?” Thus the unbelievers ask. One should reply to them: “Repent of your sins if you wish to find out; make yourselves worthy and you will see.” St. Habakkuk traveled with an angel. St. Myrope saw a host of angels and among them the martyr, St. Isidore. St. Athanasius of the Kiev Caves was dead to this world for two days and alive only in the other world. Upon the return of his soul to his body, they gathered around him and asked him: “How did you return to life? What did you see? What did you hear?” He would say nothing about it, being totally in horror at that which he had seen in the other world, and would only say: “Save yourselves!” When they pressured him to tell a little more of what he had seen in the other world after death, he replied: “Even if I should tell you, you would not believe me or listen to me.” When they urged him yet further, however, he said among other things: “Repent every moment and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Most-pure Mother.” Even in our own time, there are cases of those who have temporarily died, and the visions and accounts of those who have returned to life in the body do not contradict but rather complement one another. For example, every person who dies sees one part of that other world that is vast and incomparably larger than this world. Many people, at death, see their long-dead relatives and speak with them. This is almost a common occurrence. In 1926, in the village of Vevchani, Meletije P. was on his deathbed. He spoke with his children, who had died twenty years earlier. When his living relatives said to him, “You’re rambling!” he replied, “I am not rambling, but rather I am speaking with them as I am speaking with you, and I see them as I see you.”

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How Adam and Eve, before their sin, were clothed in innocence and did not see themselves naked;
2. How, after sinning, Adam and Eve saw themselves naked and hid themselves from God;
3. How every virtue is clothing, and every sin is nakedness.

HOMILY

-on the joyful revelations in the first sentence of the Bible-

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

How compact and full is God's every word! It is like folded linen, which can be carried under the arm and spread upon the grass over a large area. How many, many priceless good things does this word of God reveal to us: **In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.** First of all, it shows us that God is the only eternal and uncreated One. And this first revelation brings about in us the first inexpressible joy. In this whirlpool of change and transience, we are inexpressibly happy that our Creator is beyond change and transience. It further tells us that the one and only good God is the Creator of the world, and since He is the Creator, He is also both the Almighty and the Provider. And this second revelation brings about in us a second inexpressible joy. The world did not proceed out of chaos or chance, without thought and purpose, rather it proceeded from the All-wise God, omniscient and most-merciful, Who is in control of it and is guiding it toward its intended goal. It further reveals to us that this world had a beginning, and consequently it will have an end. And this third revelation brings about in us inexpressible joy. For it would be sad if this world were eternal, and if all its goals, immediate and distant, were to be found only within itself. This would indeed cause a whirlpool in the mind of the intelligent, and sadness in the heart of the righteous. It finally points out to us that God created two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly, or the incorporeal and the corporeal. And this fourth revelation brings us a fourth inexpressible joy. As we now raise our gaze to the heights and rejoice in the sun, moon and stars above our heads, so we can raise our spirit to the spiritual world, toward the angelic world, which is akin to us but purer and brighter than us. We rejoice, for we know that there is a world better than ours, which we will also enter and, like weary travelers, return home and find rest.

Oh, how sadly would men's gaze wander around the world if this were the only world and there were no starry heavens! And how sorrowfully would the spirit of man wander in the material world if there were not a spiritual world, the heavenly!

O Most-gracious Lord, glory to Thee and praise.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 3 -

1. THE HOLY PROPHET ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah was a native of Mount Sarabatha, from the tribe of Simeon. He lived and prophesied in the seventh century before Christ, at the time of Josiah the pious king of Judah. Zephaniah was a contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah. Having great humility and a pure mind raised to God, he was found worthy of discerning the future. He prophesied the day of the wrath of God and the punishment of Gaza, Ashkalon, Ashdod, Ekron, Nineveh, Jerusalem and Egypt. He saw Jerusalem as a **filthy and polluted, ... oppressing city.... Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; ... her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the Law (Zephaniah 3:1-4)**. Foreseeing the advent of the Messiah, he enthusiastically exclaimed: **Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem (Zephaniah 3:14)**. This seer of mysteries entered into rest at his birthplace to await the General Resurrection and his reward from God.

2. SAINT JOHN THE SILENT [THE HESYCHAST]

John was a native of Nicopolis in Armenia and was the son of Encratius and Euphemia. He was tonsured a monk at the age of eighteen and lived a strict and resolute life of asceticism, cleansing his heart by his many tears, fasting and prayer. After ten years, he was appointed bishop of Colonia. By his example, he attracted his brother Pergamius and his uncle Theodore-both distinguished men at the imperial courts of Emperors Zeno and Justinian-to a God-pleasing life. Seeing the malice and intrigues of this world and his inability to put matters right, he abandoned his episcopal throne. He disguised himself as a simple monk and went to the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified near Jerusalem. There he remained unknown for many years, conscientiously and capably completing every task that the abbot ordered him to do. For this, St. Sava recommended to Patriarch Elias that he ordain him a presbyter. When the patriarch wanted to ordain John, he confessed that he already possessed the rank of bishop. Then St. John closed himself in a cell and spent years and years in silence and prayer. Afterward he spent nine years in the wilderness feeding himself only on wild vegetables, and then he returned to the monastery. He turned the faithful away from the heresy of Origen and contributed greatly to the condemnation and elimination of this heresy. He clearly discerned the spiritual world and healed people from sickness. Having conquered himself, he easily conquered demons. Great in humility, might and divine wisdom, this servant of God entered peacefully into rest in the year 558 at the age of 104.

3. THE HIEROMARTYR THEODORE, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

After functioning as patriarch for two years, Theodore was ridiculed and tortured by the pagans. They placed a crown of thorns on his head and finally beheaded him for his Faith in the year 606.

4. THE VENERABLE THEODULUS

Theodulus was an eminent patrician at the court of Theodosius the Great. After the death of his wife, he renounced the vanity of the world and withdrew from Constantinople to a pillar near Ephesus, where he lived a life of asceticism for thirty years.

5. THE VENERABLE SAVA OF ZVENIGOROD

Sava was a disciple of St. Sergius of Radonezh and a great miracle-worker. Following his death, he appeared to many as though he were alive, at times teaching them, at times reproaching them and at times healing them. He passed from this life to a better life in the year 1406.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN THE SILENT

John the Silent, God's laborer,
Walked through the wilderness as a lonely hermit,
Until someone cried out: ``The barbarians are coming!
Behold how the dust rises up on the road!
They are near, very near; rise up, rise!"
``Let them be near, but God is nearer!"
John said to him, and did not move.
And when misfortune sought to overtake him,
A lion appeared, sent by God,
And began to fiercely roar at the enemy.
The horde fled; John did not move.
He competed with the severe wilderness,
He competed with her in stillness,
And in dryness and solitude.
``Pascha is coming, how shall we greet it?
What shall we eat on the feast, Father?"
The disciple asked. And John said to him:
``To every creature, God gives food."
When the Radiant Feast of Christ dawned,
An angel suddenly appeared as a man before the saint;
Bread, wine and honey he brought.
The disciple, when he beheld the miracle,
Wept at his lack of faith,
And glorified God and God's saint.

REFLECTION

God hears the prayers of the righteous and fulfills them, sometimes immediately and completely, and at other times only later, at the appropriate time and according to the needs of the Church. In other words, in fulfilling the prayers of the righteous man, God has in mind either the man's salvation or the good of the whole Church. St. John the Silent prayed to God to reveal to him how the soul separates from the body at death. While still at prayer, he was taken outside himself and had the following vision: A good man died in front of a church in Bethlehem, and angels took his soul from his body and carried it to heaven with sweet singing. Coming to himself out of his ecstasy, John immediately set out on the road from the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified to Bethlehem. When he reached Bethlehem, he saw the dead body of the man exactly as he had seen it in his vision.

When the great St. Sava the Sanctified died, John grieved and wept. Sava appeared to him in a vision and said: ``Do not grieve, Father John, for even though I am separated from you in the body, nevertheless I am with you in the spirit." Then John begged him: ``Father, pray to the Lord to take me with you." To this Sava replied: ``For now, this cannot be. A great trial has yet to befall the Lavra, and God wants you to remain in the body to comfort and strengthen the faithful against the heretics." At first, John did not know what kind of heretics the holy father had spoken of, but he found out later, when the heresy of Origen began to shake the Church of God.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How, seeing themselves naked, they covered their nakedness with fig leaves;
2. How, even now, all unrepentant sinners, when they lose a virtue, feel naked and cover their nakedness with some sort of lie or fantasy.

HOMILY

-on the two worlds-

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

Brethren, whatever God desires to reveal to men is revealed, and whatever He does not desire to reveal remains concealed. Moses, the one who beheld God, could say nothing more about heaven than that in the beginning God created it. Having said that, he continued to describe in detail the creation of the earth. Why does Moses not speak in detail about the creation of heaven? Because God did not want to reveal any more to him, since the men of his time were neither mature enough nor capable of understanding heavenly matters beyond their senses. Only when many centuries had passed and God's New Testament had come to men, did God reveal much more of the heavenly world to His faithful and chosen ones. Only Christians began to see the heavens opened. St. John the Theologian bears witness to this: **After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven (Revelation 4:1)**. St. Stephen the Protomartyr witnesses: **Behold, I see the heavens opened (Acts 7:56)**. The Apostle Paul, who was **caught up to the third heaven ... and heard unspeakable words (II Corinthians 12:2, 4)**, speaks of the angelic choirs, about the thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, and says: **All things were created by Him, and for Him (Colossians 1:16)**. His disciple, St. Dionysius, describes the celestial hierarchy in as great a detail as Moses describes the earthly world at its creation. This is how the unfathomable wisdom of God wanted it; that which God did not wish to reveal to Moses, He revealed to the apostles and their followers. What could not be told to children is told to mature men. The revelation of mysteries came through spiritual maturity.

Here is a beautiful lesson for us all. Let us be diligent in seeking the truth, still more diligent in purifying our hearts, patient in waiting, and unwavering in faith that God will give us everything in due time, in the way and to the measure necessary for our salvation.

O Lord most-wise and man-loving, Who teaches us and leads us to salvation without rushing and without delay, to Thee, O Gracious One, be glory and praise.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR BARBARA

This glorious follower of Christ was betrothed to Christ from early childhood. Her father Dioscorus was a pagan and was renowned for his position and wealth in the city of Heliopolis in Egypt. Dioscorus locked up his only daughter Barbara, brilliant in mind and of beautiful countenance, in a high tower. He surrounded her with every comfort, gave her female servants, erected idols for worship, and built her a bathing room with two windows. Looking through the window at the earth below and the starry heavens above, Barbara's mind was opened by the grace of God. She recognized the One True God, the Creator, despite the fact that she did not have a human teacher to bring her to this knowledge. Once, while her father was away from the city, she came down from the tower and, according to God's providence, met some Christian women who revealed the true Faith of Christ to her. Barbara's heart became inflamed with love for Christ the Lord. She ordered that a third window be cut open in the bath so that the three windows would represent the Holy Trinity. On one wall she traced a Cross with her finger, and the Cross etched itself deep in the stone as if cut by a chisel. A pool of water sprang forth from her footprints on the floor of the bath, which later gave healing of diseases to many. Learning of his daughter's faith, Dioscorus beat her severely and drove her from the tower. He pursued her in order to kill her, but a cliff opened up and hid Barbara from her brutal father. When she appeared again, her father brought her to Martianus, the magistrate, who handed her over for torture. They stripped the innocent Barbara and flogged her until her entire body was covered with blood and wounds, but the Lord Himself appeared to her in prison with His angels and healed her. A certain woman, Juliana, upon seeing this, desired martyrdom for herself. Both women were severely tortured and with mockery were led through the city. Their breasts were cut off and much blood flowed from them. They were finally led to the place of execution, where Dioscorus himself slaughtered his daughter, and Juliana was slain by the soldiers. That same day, lightning struck the house of Dioscorus, killing him and Martianus. St. Barbara suffered in the year 306. Her miracle-working relics rest in Kiev. Glorified in the Kingdom of Christ, she has appeared many times even in our own day, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of the Most-holy Theotokos.

2. SAINT JOHN DAMASCENE

John was first the chief minister to Caliph Abdul-Malik and later a monk in the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified. Because of his ardent defense of the veneration of icons during the reign of the iconoclastic Emperor Leo the Isaurian, John was maligned by the emperor to the Caliph, who cut off his right hand. John fell down in prayer before the icon of the Most-holy Theotokos, and his hand was rejoined and miraculously healed. Seeing this miracle the Caliph repented, but John no longer desired to remain with him as a nobleman. Instead, he withdrew to a monastery, where, from the beginning, he was a model to the monks in humility, obedience and all the prescribed rules of monastic asceticism. John composed the Funeral Hymns and compiled the **Octoechos** (The Book of Eight Tones), the **Irmologion**, the **Menologion** and the Paschal Canon, and he wrote many theological works of inspiration and profundity. A great monk, hymnographer, theologian and soldier for the truth of Christ, Damascene is numbered among the great Fathers of the Church. He entered peacefully into rest in about the year 776 at the age of 104.

3. SAINT GENNADIUS, ARCHBISHOP OF NOVGOROD

Gennadius was a distinguished writer, a champion of truth, and one who suffered for the truth of Christ. He gathered the various books of Sacred Scripture into one book and compiled the key for determining the date of Pascha (the Paschalion) for the next 532 years. He entered into rest in the Lord in the year 1505. His miracle-working relics rest in the Chudov Monastery in Moscow.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT JOHN DAMASCENE

**O wondrous trumpet of the Orthodox Faith,
O glorious monk of a glorious cenobium,
John the poet, champion of the Faith,
Holy sufferer for the holy icons,
Having glorified God you are now glorified;
Immortal trumpeter of eternal life,
You left the world for the sake of the Living Christ.
Having humbled yourself, you are glorified the more.
You took upon yourself the path of asceticism;
Through tears you beheld the heavenly mysteries;
By prayer and faith you performed miracles;
You conversed with the Mother of God.
The Faith-who could better expound it?
Who could glorify God with a sweeter hymn?
O harp of eternal truth, there is none like you,
No one like you, glorious Father Damascene.
Oh, raise even now your pure mouth,
And implore the Life-giving Christ for us,
That His mercy accompany us until death,
That we with you may glorify Him.**

REFLECTION

Obedience, coupled with humility, is the foundation of the spiritual life, the foundation of salvation and the foundation of the overall structure of the Church of God. The great John Damascene-great in every good thing-as a monk left a deep impression on the history of the Church by his exceptional example of obedience and humility. Testing him one day, his elder and spiritual father handed him woven baskets and ordered him to take them to Damascus and sell them there. The elder established a very high price for the baskets, thinking that John would not be able to sell them at that price but would have to return with them. John, therefore, firstly had to go on a long journey; secondly, he had to go as a poor monk to the city where he, at one time, had been the most powerful man after the Caliph; thirdly, he had to seek a ridiculously high price for the baskets; and fourthly, should he not sell the baskets, he would have made this enormous journey, there and back, for nothing. In this way, the elder wished to test the obedience, humility and patience of his famous disciple. John silently prostrated before the elder and, without a word, took the baskets and started on his journey. Arriving in Damascus, he stood in the market place and awaited a buyer. When he told the interested passers-by the price of his goods, they laughed at and mocked him as a lunatic. He stood there the whole day, and the whole day he was exposed to derision and ridicule. But God, Who sees all things, did not abandon His patient servant. A certain citizen passed by and looked at John. Even though John was clad in a poor monk's habit and his face was withered and pale from fasting, this citizen recognized in him the one-time lord and first minister of the Caliph, in whose service he had also been. John also recognized him, but they both began to deal as strangers. Even though John named the all-too-high price of the baskets, the citizen purchased and paid for them without a word, recalling the good that John Damascene had once done for him. As a victor, holy John returned to the monastery rejoicing, and brought joy to his elder.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How Adam and Eve, having sinned, hid themselves from God;
2. How, hearing the voice of God, they fled and hid themselves among the trees;
3. How, even now, every sin estranges us from God;
4. How a sinner, hearing the voice of God through his conscience, hides himself in irrational nature.

HOMILY

-on how everything is good that is of God-

And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

Brethren, only good works proceed from the good Creator. Therefore, let all those who say that both good and evil proceed from God be silent. After His every act, God Himself affirms that it is good. Six times He repeated that what He created was good, and finally, the seventh time, when He saw all in its entirety, He pronounced His judgment that all He had created **was very good (Genesis 1:31)**. Therefore, in total He repeated seven times that everything was good that came into existence by His holy will. Is it not a great wonder that some people come up with the godless assertion that both good and evil equally proceed from God? God, as if He knew that such slanders would be cast against Him-or, better to say, that such slanders would be cast throughout the centuries-gave His defense in advance and repeated it seven times, for all times and for all generations. Evil comes from sin, and there is no sin in God. Therefore, God can do no evil. He is called the Almighty because He is powerful to do every good. Wicked and twisted are the commentators on God who claim that God is "Almighty" because He can do both good and evil. God is the source of good and is darkened by nothing, and nothing can proceed from Him that is contrary to good. It is obvious to every normal man that evil is contrary to good. Know, brethren, that those who speak of duality in God, in the eternal Source of good, are those in whom is found the duality of good and evil. However, all those who love good, follow the path of goodness, and yearn for good have a clear revelation within themselves that God is good, and only good.

O our God, our Creator, Thou art the Creator of all good, and all Thy works are good.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE SAVA THE SANCTIFIED

The unknown village of Mutalaska, in the province of Cappadocia, became famous through this great luminary of the Orthodox Church. Sava was born there of his parents John and Sophia. At the age of eight, he left the home of his parents and was tonsured a monk in a nearby monastic community called Flavian's. After ten years, he moved to the monasteries of Palestine and remained longest in the Monastery of St. Euthymius the Great (January 20) and Theoctistus. The clairvoyant Euthymius prophesied of Sava that he would become a famous monk and a teacher of monks and that he would establish a lavra greater than all the lavras of that time. After the death of Euthymius, Sava withdrew to the desert, where he lived for five years as a hermit in a cave shown to him by an angel of God. Afterward, when he had been perfected in the monastic life, he began by divine providence to gather around him many who were desirous of the spiritual life. Soon, such a large number gathered that Sava had to build a church and many cells. Some Armenians also came to him, and for them he provided a cave where they would be able to celebrate services in the Armenian language. When his father died, his aged mother Sophia came to him, and he tonsured her a nun. He gave her a cell located at a distance from his monastery, where she lived a life of asceticism until her death. This holy father endured many assaults from all sides: from those who were close to him, from heretics, and from demons. But he triumphed over them all: those close to him, by kindness and indulgence; the heretics, by his unwavering confession of the Orthodox Faith; the demons, by the sign of the Cross and calling upon God for help. He had a particularly great struggle with demons on Mount Castellium, where he established his second monastery. In all, Sava established seven monasteries. He and Theodosius the Great, his neighbor, are considered to be the greatest lights and pillars of Orthodoxy in the East. They corrected emperors and patriarchs in matters of the Faith, and to everyone they served as an example of saintly humility and the miraculous power of God. After a toilsome and very fruitful life, St. Sava entered into rest in the year 532, at the age of ninety-four. Among his many wondrous and good works, let it at least be mentioned that he was the first to compile the Order of Services for use in monasteries, now known as the Jerusalem Typicon.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYRS OF KARYES

They suffered at the hands of the Papists at the time of the Union of Lyons [1274], which was the work of Emperor Michael Palaeologus (1260-1281) and the pope. The Protos of the Holy Mountain was hanged, and the others were beheaded. (For details about this, see October 10.)

3. THE VENERABLE NECTARIUS OF BITOLA

Nectarius was born in Bitola and lived a life of asceticism in the Monastery of the Holy Unmercenary Physicians Cosmas and Damian, together with his father, Pachomius, who was also tonsured. After that he went to Karyes, where he continued his asceticism in the Cell of the Holy Archangels under the guidance of Elders Philotheus and Dionysius. After conquering human envy, demonic assaults and difficult illnesses, he entered into rest in the Kingdom of Christ on December 5, 1500. His incorrupt and fragrant relics rest in this same cell.

4. THE VENERABLE KARION AND ZACHARIAS

Karion and Zacharias were father and son, and both were great Egyptian ascetics. Karion left his wife and two children and set off to become a monk. As a child, the young Zacharias was taken into the monastery, and in his ascetic labors he surpassed both his father and many other notable ascetics. When they asked Zacharias, "Who is a true monk?" he replied: "He who constantly applies himself to the fulfilling of God's commandments."

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SAVA THE SANCTIFIED

Venerable Sava, chief of monks,
Spiritual commander of Christ's heroes,
Was glorified by fasting, vigils and meekness,
By prayer and faith and blessed mercy.
You taught the monks to not be concerned with bread;
You entrusted yourself to heaven, with labor and prayer.
You sought neither precedence nor rank of any kind.
Most rarely did you taste of oil and wine.
You kept all the services at the appointed time.
"Let the service be a joy and not a heavy burden,"
St. Sava told the monks,
And he showed this to all by his example.
Like a wise gardener, he enclosed the garden,
And carefully planted many young men.
The young men grew and brought forth fruit:
A regiment of monks, to the glory of Sava.
Fifteen hundred years have passed,
Yet Sava's spiritual garden still blooms:
One thousand monks, a hundred thousand,
Have been raised up by Sava's community up to now.
St. Sava, glorious recluse,
O God-pleaser, pray for us also.

REFLECTION

A man may be great in some skill, as a statesman or a military leader, but no one among men is greater than a man who is great in faith, hope and love. How great St. Sava the Sanctified was in faith and hope in God is best shown by the following incident: One day, the steward of the monastery came to Sava and informed him that the following Saturday and Sunday he would be unable to strike the semantron, according to tradition, to summon the brethren to the communal service and meal because there was not a trace of flour in the monastery nor anything at all to eat or drink. For this same reason, even the Divine Liturgy was not possible. The saint replied without hesitation: "I shall not cancel the Divine Liturgy because of the lack of flour; faithful is He Who commanded us not to be concerned about bodily things, and mighty is He to feed us in time of hunger." And he placed all his hope in God. In this extremity, he was prepared to send some of the ecclesiastical vessels or vestments to be sold in the city so that neither the divine services nor the brother's customary meal would be omitted. However, before Saturday some men, moved by divine providence, brought thirty mules laden with wheat, wine and oil to the monastery. "What do you say now, Brother?" Sava asked the steward. "Shall we not strike the semantron and assemble the fathers?" The steward was ashamed because of his lack of faith and begged the abbot for forgiveness. Sava's biographer describes this saint as "severe with demons but mild toward men." Once, some monks rebelled against St. Sava, and for this they were driven from the monastery by order of Patriarch Elias. They built themselves huts by the river Thekoa, where they endured privation in all things. Hearing that they were starving, St. Sava loaded mules with flour and brought it to them personally. Seeing that they had no church, he built one for them. At first, the monks received him with hatred, but afterward they responded to his love with love and repented of their former misdeeds toward him.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How the All-gracious God called out to sinful Adam, **Where art thou?**
2. How God showed Himself to be the Good Shepherd, Who, even in Paradise, called out for His lost sheep;
3. How, even now, God calls out to every sinner, **Where art thou?** (desiring by these words to reproach him and to warn him).

HOMILY

-on the absence of evil in God's works-

And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1).

Brethren, the first revelation about this world that Holy Scripture communicates to us is that the world proceeded from good and not from evil, from God and not from some power contrary to God and not from some imagined primordial mixture of good and evil. The second revelation, brethren, about this world is that everything that the good God created is good. The light is good; the firmament of heaven is good; the land is good; the sea is good; the grass, the vegetation and the fruitful trees are good; the heavenly lights- the sun, moon and stars-are good; the living creatures in the water and the birds in the air are good; all living beings according to their kind are good; the cattle, the small animals and the beasts of the earth are good. Finally, man-the master, under the lordship of God, over all created things-is also good. **And God saw that it was good.** The appraiser of the value of this world is not and cannot be someone who views this world superficially and partially, but can only be He who views all of creation together and each part individually, He who knows their number, name, composition and essence incomparably better than all men on earth. **And God saw that it was very good (Genesis 1:31).** But, nevertheless, there have been men who have slandered the work of God, saying that this world is evil in its essence, that each individual creation is evil, and that matter, from which all earthly beings are formed, is evil. However, evil is found in sin, and sin is from the evil spirit; therefore, evil dwells in the spirit of evil and not in matter. This spirit, fallen from God, is the sower of evil in the world, from whence come the tares in God's wheat. The spirit of evil strives to use both the human spirit and material things in general as his weapons of evil. He is also the one who instills in the human mind the thought that the whole created world is evil and that matter, from which creation was formed, is fundamentally evil. He slanders God's works in order to conceal his own works; he accuses God in order not to be accused. O my brethren, let us guard ourselves from the cunning of the evil spirit. Let us guard ourselves in particular from the evil thoughts that he sows in our minds.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our true Enlightener and Savior, into Thy hands we give over our minds and our hearts. Do Thou illumine us with Thy true light.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER, ARCHBISHOP OF MYRA IN LYCIA

This glorious saint, celebrated even today throughout the entire world, was the only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, citizens of the city of Patara in Lycia. Since he was the only son bestowed on them by God, the parents returned the gift to God by dedicating their son to Him. St. Nicholas learned of the spiritual life from his uncle Nicholas, Bishop of Patara, and was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of New Zion founded by his uncle. Following the death of his parents, Nicholas distributed all his inherited goods to the poor, not keeping anything for himself. As a priest in Patara, he was known for his charity, even though he carefully concealed his charitable works, fulfilling the words of the Lord: **Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth (Matthew 6:3)**. When he gave himself over to solitude and silence, thinking to live that way until his death, a voice from on high came to him: "Nicholas, for your ascetic labor, work among the people, if thou desirest to be crowned by Me." Immediately after that, by God's wondrous providence, he was chosen archbishop of the city of Myra in Lycia. Merciful, wise and fearless, Nicholas was a true shepherd to his flock. During the persecution of Christians under Diocletian and Maximian, he was cast into prison, but even there he instructed the people in the Law of God. He was present at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea [325] and, out of great zeal for the truth, struck the heretic Arius with his hand. For this act he was removed from the Council and from his archiepiscopal duties, until the Lord Christ Himself and the Most-holy Theotokos appeared to several of the chief hierarchs and revealed their approval of Nicholas. A defender of God's truth, this wonderful saint was ever bold as a defender of justice among the people. On two occasions, he saved three men from an undeserved sentence of death. Merciful, truthful, and a lover of justice, he walked among the people as an angel of God. Even during his lifetime, the people considered him a saint and invoked his aid in difficulties and in distress. He appeared both in dreams and in person to those who called upon him, and he helped them easily and speedily, whether close at hand or far away. A light shone from his face as it did from the face of Moses, and he, by his presence alone, brought comfort, peace and good will among men. In old age he became ill for a short time and entered into the rest of the Lord, after a life full of labor and very fruitful toil, to rejoice eternally in the Kingdom of Heaven, continuing to help the faithful on earth by his miracles and to glorify his God. He entered into rest on December 6, 343.

2. SAINT NICHOLAS, BISHOP OF PATARA

Nicholas was the uncle of the great St. Nicholas, and it was he who guided him to the spiritual life and ordained him a priest.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR NICHOLAS KARAMOS

Nicholas was cruelly tortured for the Christian Faith by the Turks and was hanged in Smyrna in the year 1657.

4. SAINT THEOPHILUS, BISHOP OF ANTIOCH

A man well educated in Hellenic philosophy, Theophilus, after reading the Holy Scriptures, was baptized and became a great defender of the Christian Faith. His work "On the Faith" is preserved even today. He governed the Church of Antioch for thirteen years and entered into rest in the year 181.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER, ARCHBISHOP OF MYRA IN LYCIA

Holy Father Nicholas,
The four corners of the world glorify you
As a knight of the powerful Faith,
The Faith of God, the true Faith.
From the cradle he was devoted to God,
From the cradle until the end;
And God glorified him-
His faithful Nicholas.
Famous was he throughout his life,
And even more renowned after death;
Mighty on earth was he,
And even more mighty is he in heaven.
Glowing spirit, pure heart,
He was a temple of the Living God;
For this the people glorify him
As a wondrous saint.
Nicholas, rich in glory,
Loves those who honor him as their "Krsna Slava";
Before the throne of the eternal God,
He prays for their good.
O Nicholas, bless us,
Bless your people
Who, before God and before you,
Humbly stand in prayer.

REFLECTION

In icons of St. Nicholas, the Lord Savior is usually depicted on one side with a Gospel in His hands, and the Most-holy Virgin Theotokos is depicted on the other side with an episcopal omophorion in her hands. This has a twofold historical significance: first, it signifies the calling of Nicholas to the hierarchical office, and second, it signifies his exoneration from the condemnation that followed his confrontation with Arius. St. Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople, writes: "One night St. Nicholas saw our Savior in glory, standing by him and extending to him the Gospel, adorned with gold and pearls. On his other side, he saw the Theotokos, who was placing the episcopal pallium on his shoulders." Shortly after this vision, John the Archbishop of Myra died and St. Nicholas was appointed archbishop of that city. That was the first incident. The second incident occurred at the time of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea. Unable to stop Arius through reason from espousing the irrational blasphemy against the Son of God and His Most-holy Mother, St. Nicholas struck Arius on the face with his hand. The Holy Fathers at the Council, protesting such an action, banned Nicholas from the Council and deprived him of all emblems of the episcopal rank. That same night, several of the Holy Fathers saw an identical vision: how the Lord Savior and the Most-holy Theotokos were standing around St. Nicholas-on one side the Lord Savior with the Gospel, and on the other side the Most-holy Theotokos with a pallium, presenting the saint with the episcopal emblems that had been removed from him. Seeing this, the fathers were awestruck and quickly returned to Nicholas that which had been removed. They began to respect him as a great chosen one of God, and they interpreted his actions against Arius not as an act of unreasonable anger, but rather an expression of great zeal for God's truth.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How God cursed the serpent;
2. How He imposed upon Eve the pain of child-bearing and on Adam the burden of toil;
3. How He cursed the ground in the works of man;
4. How He did not curse ground as ground but rather **in thy works**, i.e., in the works of man.

HOMILY

-on the absence of sin in the works of God-

And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1).

Brethren, everything that was created, and the means by which the pure and sinless God created it, is pure and sinless. Every creature of God is pure and sinless as long as it is turned toward God, as long as it is neither separated from God nor hostile to God. Every creature of itself praises and glorifies God as long as it is pure and sinless. That is why the Psalmist sings: **Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Alleluia! (Psalm 150:6)**. Every intelligent creature of God feels that its natural and primary purpose is to praise the Lord. Thus, brethren, people ask: "If this is so, from whence comes evil into the world?" It comes from sin, and only from sin. Sin changed a bright angel into a devil. The devil willingly made himself a vessel of sin and then hurried to make other creatures of God similar vessels. By their own free choice, other angels consented to sin with the devil, and afterward the first people, Eve and Adam, consented. From this proceeded the mixture of good and evil in the world. However, even today, that which is of God in creation is good, as it was in the first days of creation. Poison came from sin, for sin is indeed poison, the most bitter poison that exists. Sin was the cause of the curse. It brought about the darkening of minds and caused created things to become hostile toward their Creator. It distanced man from God, and man from man, and man from nature, and nature from man. O my brethren, all that comes from God is good, and all that comes from sin is evil. No evil exists that is bound to God, and there exists no kind of evil that is not bound to sin. Many philosophers have examined the essence of evil, and because of their crude minds they have asserted that evil is in matter and that matter is evil. However, only we Christians know that sin is the essence of evil and that evil has no essence other than sin. It is obvious from this that if we desire to protect ourselves from evil, we must protect ourselves from sin.

O sinless God, help us to protect ourselves from sin and the corruption of sin.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 7 -

1. SAINT AMBROSE, BISHOP OF MEDIOLANUM (MILAN)

This great holy father of the Orthodox Church was of eminent birth. His father was the imperial deputy of Gaul and Spain and was a pagan by faith, but his mother was a Christian. While he was still in the cradle, a swarm of bees settled on him, poured honey onto his lips, and flew away. And while still a child, he extended his hand and spoke prophetically: "Kiss it, for I will be a bishop." After his father's death, the emperor appointed him as his representative in the province of Liguria, of which Milan was the chief city. When the bishop of Milan died, a great dispute arose between the Orthodox Christians and the Arian heretics concerning the election of a new bishop. Ambrose entered the church to maintain order, this being his duty. At that moment, a child at its mother's bosom exclaimed: "Ambrose for bishop!" All the people took this as the voice of God, and unanimously elected Ambrose as their bishop, contrary to his will. Ambrose was baptized, passed through all the necessary ranks and was consecrated to the episcopacy, all within a week. As bishop, Ambrose strengthened the Orthodox Faith, suppressed the heretics, adorned churches, spread the Faith among the pagans, wrote many instructive books, and served as an example of a true Christian and a true Christian shepherd. He composed the famous hymn "We Praise Thee, O God." This glorious hierarch, whom men visited from distant lands for his wisdom and sweetness of words, was very restrained, diligent and vigilant. He slept very little, labored and prayed constantly, and fasted every day except Saturday and Sunday. Therefore, God allowed him to witness many of His miracles and to perform miracles himself. He discovered the relics of the Holy Martyrs Protasius, Gervasius, Nazarius and Celsus (October 14). Meek toward lesser men, he was fearless before the great. He reproached Empress Justina as a heretic, cursed Maximus the tyrant and murderer, and forbade Emperor Theodosius to enter a church until he had repented of his sin. He also refused to meet with Eugenius, the tyrannical and self-styled emperor. God granted this man, so pleasing to Him, such grace that he even raised the dead, drove out demons from men, healed the sick of every infirmity, and foresaw the future. Ambrose died peacefully on the morning of Pascha in the year 397.

2. THE VENERABLE GREGORY THE HESYCHAST

Gregory was a Serb by birth. He was the founder of the Monastery of St. Nicholas on the Holy Mountain, known as "Gregoriou" after him. His cell, where he prayed in silence and repented, can be found about a quarter of an hour distance from the monastery. In the year 1761, there was a great fire in the monastery, and on this occasion some of the monks took his relics and translated them to Serbia. This man of God entered peacefully into rest in the year 1406.

3. THE VENERABLE NILUS OF STOLBENSK

Nilus was a farmer and was born in Novgorod. Withdrawing into the wilderness, he fed on plants. At the instruction of a voice from on high, he settled on the island of Stolbensk. Once, some robbers entered his cell in order to plunder it, and they were immediately blinded. He dug a grave for himself close to his cell and wept over it every day. Nilus entered into rest peacefully and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in the year 1554. His miracle-working relics rest in the place where he fasted.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT AMBROSE, BISHOP OF MILAN

Ambrose, converted late in life,
Ambrose, soon consecrated,
A pillar of truth, a light of piety,
A soldier of Christ, a persecutor of impiety,
He divinely served the Church of God,
And the Church repaid its shepherd.
In hymns and with love, the Church glorifies him,
And angels are among those who glorify him.
The Church glorifies him as a father,
As a shepherd, and as a miracle-worker;
And as a wise man equal to Solomon,
The whole universe recognizes him,
The invisible as well as the visible,
And to the Living God it renders praise.
Thee, O God, we also glorify,
And to Thy power we bow down-
To Thy might and Thy mercy,
Eternal justice, wondrous wisdom.
Most beautifully Thy glory shone
Through Thy wonderful St. Ambrose.
O how merciful art Thou, O God,
O how wondrous art Thou in Thy saints!

REFLECTION

Brethren, God returns a loan a hundredfold, when it is lent to Him through the poor. At one time, there was a Christian woman married to a pagan, and they lived together in love and poverty. When the husband, with much difficulty, saved up fifty silver pieces, he told his wife that this money should be given to someone as a loan with interest. Otherwise, he stated, they would spend their savings coin by coin, and again they would be left with nothing. His wife replied: "If you want to loan it out, lend it to the Christian God." "And where is the Christian God?" the husband asked. His wife led him to the church and told him to distribute the money to the beggars in front of the church, saying to her husband: "The Christian God will accept this from them, since all of them are His." They distributed all fifty silver pieces to the poor and returned home. After a period of time, they were left without any bread in the house. Then the wife told her husband to go to the church, and he would receive the money that he loaned to God. The man went to the church and saw only beggars there, and in his perplexity as to who would give him money, he walked around the church. Suddenly he saw a silver coin in front of him. He took it, purchased a fish with it, and brought the fish home. He complained to his wife that he had not seen anyone and no one had given him anything, but that he accidentally had found a silver coin. His wife replied: "God is invisible and works in an unseen manner." When the wife cut open the fish, she found a glittering stone in it. She gave this stone to her husband and he took it to a merchant to see what he could get for it. The merchant offered him five silver pieces, and the man began to laugh, thinking that the merchant was joking by offering him such a high price. However, the merchant, thinking that the man was laughing because of the small price he had offered him, then offered him ten, then fifteen, then thirty, then fifty silver pieces. The man, realizing that it was a precious stone, began to hesitate. The merchant raised the price higher and higher until he reached the price of three hundred silver pieces. Then the man accepted the three hundred silver pieces and went home joyfully. "Do you see how good the Christian God is?" his wife said to him. The amazed husband was immediately baptized and, together with his wife, glorified God.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3**):

1. How God drove Adam and Eve out of Paradise;
2. How He placed the Cherubim with a flaming sword before the gate of Paradise;
3. How Paradise remained closed to men until the advent of Christ the Lord on earth.

HOMILY

-on how all that God created was very good-

And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

Brethren, when all the parts of a building are good, then the building in its entirety is very good. Every single brick is good, and every stone, the mortar and the lime, and the beams and the pillars-but man is moved to admiration only when he views the entire structure. Oftentimes, a certain detail in the building seems unintelligible and inappropriate to him, but he forgets about this in a moment when he turns his gaze upon the whole. And, indeed, there are many details in this world, as well as in things and in events, that are unintelligible and inappropriate to us. Only when the entire thing as a whole is revealed to us do we understand and are reassured. We consider many of the sufferings and deprivations in our lives as truly ugly and senseless at the time they occur. However, when days and years pass, those very sufferings and deprivations shine as precious stones in our memory, illumining the later path of our life. Therefore, if something in God's creation offends you, look at the whole; if something in life embitters you, wait patiently with faith and hope for new days and years. And if this entire life seems painful and sorrowful to you, raise your spiritual eyes to the other world, and you will have peace and joy. For this entire visible world is not a perfect whole-the other world also exists. For it is said: **God created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1)**. Even an artist directs the viewer to look at his painting from a distance, so that he may see it in all its beauty.

O Lord, O Immortal Artist, how very good is everything that Thou hast created!

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE PATAPIUS

Patapius was born and brought up in the Faith and in the fear of God by pious parents in the Egyptian city of Thebes. At an early age he perceived and abhorred the vanity of this world and withdrew into the wilderness of Egypt. There he devoted himself to a life of asceticism, cleansing his heart of all earthly desires and thoughts, for the sake of God's love. However, when his virtues became known among the people, they began to come to him and to seek solace from him in their sufferings. Fearing the praise of men, which darkens the minds of men and separates them from God, Patapius fled this wilderness to Constantinople, for this wonderful saint thought that he could hide himself more easily from people in the city than in the wilderness. Patapius built a hut for himself in the proximity of the Church of Blachernae in Constantinople. There, immured and unknown, he continued his interrupted life of eremitic asceticism. However, a light cannot be hidden. A child, blind from birth, was led by God's providence to St. Patapius. He besought the saint to pray to God that he be given his sight and be able to look upon God's creation-thus allowing him to praise God all the more. Patapius having compassion on the suffering child, prayed to God, and the child's sight was restored. This miracle revealed God's chosen one throughout the entire city, and people rushed to him for healing, comfort and instruction. Patapius healed an eminent man of dropsy by tracing the sign of the Cross over him and anointing him with oil. By making the sign of the Cross in the air with his hand, he freed a youth from an unclean spirit that had cruelly tormented him. The evil spirit, with a loud shriek, came out from God's creature like smoke. He made the sign of the Cross over a woman who had a sore on her breast all filled with worms, and made her healthy. Many other miracles did St. Patapius perform, all through prayer in the name of Christ and by the sign of the Cross. He entered into rest peacefully in great old age and took up his habitation in the Heavenly Kingdom in the seventh century.

2. THE HOLY APOSTLES SOSTHENES, APOLLOS, TYCHICUS, EPAPHRODITUS, ONESIPHORUS, CEPHAS AND CAESAR

All of them are commemorated on January 4 with the other lesser apostles. St. Apollos is also commemorated separately on September 10; St. Onesiphorus, September 7; Saints Cephas and Caesar, March 30. St. Sosthenes was bishop in Caesarea, and St. Tychicus was his successor in the same city. Epaphroditus was bishop in Andriopolis in Pamphylia; Cephas, in Iconium; and Caesar, in the Colophon Peloponnese. They all preached the Gospel of Christ with burning love, endured suffering for His holy name and entered into the Kingdom of Eternal Joy.

3. THE HOLY MARTYRS IN AFRICA

They suffered for the truth of the Orthodox Faith at the hands of the Arian heretics during the reign of the Vandal King Gunerik or Genzerik (477-484). Two priests were burned and sixty more had their tongues cut out. In addition, three hundred laymen were beheaded. All of them suffered, but they defeated falsehood and confirmed Orthodoxy through their deaths, handing the Faith down to us pure and untarnished. The Lord crowned them with wreaths of glory in His Immortal Kingdom.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE PATAPIUS

Patapius, like a mariner,
Fixes his gaze into the tempest,
Where he will see the light of the harbor
Beyond this vain and glorious world,
Agitated by the winds of passions,
Darkened by the gloom of vanity.
He casts a glance to the heavens-
Patapius, like a mariner.
The spirit is the eye for seeing heaven
And the wondrous heavenly world-
A true spirit in a pure heart.
Patapius, his soul directed to God,
Bathed his heart in tender tears.
Concentrated, he awaits the light,
The light of heaven, the calm harbor-
Patapius, like a mariner.
Whosoever seeks shall find;
Whosoever knocks, to him it shall be opened.
The Merciful God loves the saints,
The thirsty seekers of the Kingdom of God.
He captured Patapius's glance,
And revealed the heavenly light to him.
Patapius saw and he wept-
God's light inflamed by tears-
Until he sailed to the calm harbor.
His life has remained a wondrous sign
To voyagers on the open seas of the world.

REFLECTION

He who surrenders himself completely to God is guided by God to salvation, and is used by Him for the benefit of many others. St. Nicholas, devoted to the will of God, fled from the glory of men, from his city of Patara, and came to the city of Myra in Lycia, where he knew no one and was known by no one. Without any means-for, although he had been wealthy by virtue of his family, he had abandoned everything-without acquaintances and without plans, he walked as an unknown one throughout the city, waiting for God to direct his steps. At that time John the Archbishop of Myra died, and the Synod gathered for the election of a new archbishop, but could not agree on any person who had been nominated. Finally, the members of the Synod decided to fast and pray to God that He would designate the one who was most worthy of this calling. God heeded the prayers of His servants and revealed to them the one most worthy. When the presiding bishop stood for prayer, a man appeared to him in light and told him to go out early, stand in front of the church, and await the first one who would enter for morning prayer. ``Appoint him as archbishop; his name is Nicholas," he said. Seeing and hearing this, the bishop informed all of his companions. Early the next day, he went in front of the church and waited. At that moment St. Nicholas, who had the habit of rising early for prayer, appeared. Seeing him, the bishop asked him: ``What is your name, son?" Nicholas remained silent. The bishop again asked him, and he replied: ``I am called Nicholas, O Bishop, the servant of your holiness." Then the bishop took him by the hand, brought him before the Synod, and said: ``Receive, brethren, your shepherd, who was anointed by the Holy Spirit and was elected not by the Synod of men but rather by the providence of God."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the first brotherhood of men upon earth (**Genesis 4**):

1. How Cain and Abel were the first brothers on earth;
2. How Abel was virtuous and God-fearing, and Cain was envious and self-willed;
3. How the envious Cain slew the virtuous Abel.

HOMILY

-on the curse of sinful works-

Cursed is the ground in thy works (Genesis 3:17).

After Adam and Eve's sin, God pronounced a punishment. He did not pronounce the punishment immediately but after waiting a period of time for their repentance. This is shown in the conversation into which God entered with Adam after his sin. **Where art thou? (Genesis 3:9)**, God asked Adam. And when Adam said that he hid because of his nakedness, God asked him again: **Who told thee that thou wast naked? (Genesis 3:11)**. Instead of repenting, Adam then began to accuse his wife. After that, God pronounced the punishment. Upon the serpent, which served as the weapon of the devil, fell the infinite curse. The woman was condemned to bear children in pain and to have her will subject to the authority of her husband. This is not a curse but rather a punishment with hope. Man was condemned to work the land. But what do the words, **Cursed is the ground in thy works**, mean? Did God curse the ground as He cursed the serpent with an infinite curse? By no means! The ground is cursed only in the sinful works of man. Because of man's sin, the earth produces thorns; because of sin, there is infertility; because of sin, there are droughts, floods, earthquakes, plagues, and destructive insects such as grasshoppers and caterpillars. That the ground is not cursed in its entirety is clear from this: that the earth also produces good fruits. God, through the prayers of the righteous, has always blessed the fruits of the earth necessary for human life, and even the angels of God, as the guests of Abraham, tasted the earth's harvest (**Genesis 18:1-8**). For in what way is the earth and all the rest of God's creation (except the serpent) culpable for Adam's sin? Nevertheless, **the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now (Romans 8:22)**. All creation does not groan or travail because of a curse upon itself but rather because of man's sinful works, which are cursed. O my brethren, let us be ashamed of our sin, for which even God's innocent creation suffers.

O Gracious God, forgive us our past sins and protect us from future sins. O Merciful God, have mercy on all Thine innocent creatures, who suffer because of us, and ease their suffering.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 9 -

1. THE CONCEPTION OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS BY SAINT ANNA

The righteous Joachim and Anna were childless for fifty years of their married life. In their old age the Archangel Gabriel appeared to each one of them separately, telling them that God had heard their prayers and that they would give birth to a daughter, Mary. Then St. Anna conceived by her husband and after nine months bore a daughter blessed by God and by all generations of men: the Most-holy Virgin Mary, the Theotokos. (For more details, see September 9.)

2. SAINT HANNAH, MOTHER OF THE PROPHET SAMUEL

Hannah was the wife of Elkanah from Ramathaim Zophim or Arimathea (**I Samuel 1:1-2**). Hannah had not given birth to any children because she was barren, and this caused her to weep and grieve bitterly. But the Merciful God showed pity on her and removed her barrenness because of her ceaseless sighs and prayers. Hannah bore a son, Samuel, and dedicated him to God from his childhood. Samuel was a great leader of the nation of Israel and a prophet, who anointed two kings, Saul and David. St. Hannah sang a hymn of thanksgiving to God, a hymn wonderful both in its wisdom and its beauty, which is used even to this day in the services of the Church (**I Samuel 2:1**).

3. THE VENERABLE STEPHEN THE NEW LIGHT

This God-pleaser was born and brought up in Constantinople in the home of his parents, Zacharias and Theophano. His father was a priest of the Great Church at the time of Patriarch Methodius. While carrying him in her womb, his mother fed only on bread and water, and when the child was born a cross of light shone on his chest. Because of this and because of his pure and God-pleasing life, he is called the "New Light." At the age of eighteen Stephen enclosed himself in a cell near the Church of St. Peter the Apostle, and there he gave himself up to the ascetic labor of fasting and prayer. Once St. Peter appeared to him and said: "Peace be to you, my child. You have made a good beginning. May the Lord strengthen you." Following this, he lived for many years in a cell by the Church of the Holy Martyr Antipas. This saint also appeared to him and encouraged him with the words: "Know that I will not abandon you." Stephen imposed even greater and greater hardships upon himself. He ate only twice a week and then only unsalted vegetables. This holy man lived a life of asceticism for fifty-five years for the sake of Christ's Kingdom and entered into rest in the Lord in the year 829, at the age of seventy-three.

4. SAINT SOPHRONIUS, ARCHBISHOP OF CYPRUS

Sophronius was born and brought up in Cyprus. Because of his great spiritual learning and his many virtues, especially compassion, he was appointed archbishop following St. Damian. Having faithfully served the Church and pleased God, Sophronius died peacefully in the sixth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE CONCEPTION OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS BY SAINT ANNA

O Most-glorious God, wonderful and marvelous,
Kind and merciful toward all creation,
The proud dost Thou overturn, the humble dost Thou raise;
Thou Who dost extinguish, Thou Who makest to live,
According to Thy plan, O Creator, Thou canst do all,
According to Thy plan, eternal and divine.
With Thy blessing, the fertile earth brings forth fruit;
By Thy holy word, Thou settest a seal upon the barren.
From one who gives birth, Thou canst take away,
And for the barren one, Thou canst bring forth good fruit.
Thou madest fertile the barren Anna;
Thou didst grant her a holy and noble daughter.
That which was the subject of mockery, Thou didst crown with glory;
The dream of a childless woman Thou didst openly surpass.
The aged woman prayed; her prayer Thou didst accept.
The seal of barrenness Thou didst remove from her body;
Her dead body Thou didst fill with life;
Thou gavest her a Virgin, wondrous in beauty,
And a daughter was born, the Most-holy Virgin,
A Daughter, a Mother, and the Mother of God!
According to Thy plan, O Creator, Thou canst do all,
According to Thy plan, eternal and divine.

REFLECTION

Fear of God drives all fear from the hearts of men. In every great hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, we see meekness and fearlessness wonderfully united. St. Nicholas grabbed the sword of the executioner and pulled it away so that innocent men would not be beheaded. St. Chrysostom reproached the Empress Eudoxia for her misdeeds without consideration for the unpleasantness and danger to his own life, to which he was exposed as a result. And there are many, many other examples similar to this: Emperor Valentinian the Elder, upon hearing of Ambrose's stern criticism of him, said: "I knew of your fearlessness; that is why I helped you to be chosen as bishop. Correct our faults as the Law of God teaches, and heal our unrighteousness." When Valentinian the Younger, at the instigation of his mother Justina, an Arian, ordered that the cathedral church in Milan be yielded to the heretics, Ambrose shut himself in the church with the faithful and would not come out for three days. He sent a message to the emperor and empress that, if they desired his death, he was prepared at any moment "here in the church to be run through either by the sword or spear." Hearing this, the emperor and empress withdrew their decree. When a riot occurred in Thessalonica, at which time about seven thousand people were beheaded by the decree of Emperor Theodosius the Great, Ambrose became so enraged at the emperor that, when the emperor visited Milan and wished to enter the church, the saint forbade him. The emperor said to Ambrose: "Even David sinned and was not deprived of God's mercy." To this the bishop replied: "As you have imitated David in sin, imitate him also in repentance." The emperor was ashamed, turned back and repented bitterly of the sin he had committed.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the righteousness of the righteous Noah (**Genesis 6**):

1. How all men were corrupt and wicked;
2. How, amidst universal corruption, Noah alone remained righteous and lived according to the will of God.

HOMILY

-on Noah-

Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

To be righteous among the righteous is a great and praiseworthy deed, but how far greater and more praiseworthy a deed it is to be righteous among the unrighteous. Noah lived among men who were filled with unrighteousness and evil; he lived among them for five hundred years and remained righteous before God: **Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8)**. The Most-high Judge, who looks at all the works of mankind and evaluates them without prejudice and without error, valued the labors of Noah because, in the midst of a corrupt and perverse generation, he remained in the righteousness of God; and God rewarded him with His grace. Assuredly, Noah endured much misery and bitterness from his evil neighbors. Assuredly, he was unable to have a friend among them. The greatest satisfaction for a sinner is to drag a righteous man down into his own mire and to share his sin with him. But Noah did not allow himself to be dragged down or misled. Noah favored God's friendship over that of unrighteous men. It was dearer to him to walk with God without men, than to walk with men without God. Fear of God, the Creator and Judge, preserved him from the worldwide corruption; and he was not only righteous but also **perfect in his generations**. That is, he did not allow himself, even in the least, to be contaminated by the common evil, but rather he cleaved to God's righteousness. The allurements of sin and the ridicule of the sinners: everything merely served to separate him all the more from them. When the universal flood befell the human race, God did not abandon his faithful Noah to perish with the others. Instead, He saved him and glorified him, making him the progenitor of a new generation of men. Brethren, this shining example of Noah teaches that each one of us can please God even in the midst of sinners, if only we want to.

O Righteous and Long-suffering God, uphold us on the path of Thy righteousness.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS MENAS, HERMOGENES AND EUGRAPHUS

Both Menas and Hermogenes were born in Athens. They both lived in Byzantium, being held in great honor by the emperor and the people. Menas was known for his great learning and eloquence of speech and, although he acted outwardly as a pagan, he was a convinced Christian in his heart. Hermogenes was Eparch of Byzantium and acted as a pagan both inwardly and outwardly, but he was compassionate and performed many good deeds. When a dispute flared up between the Christians and the pagans in Alexandria, Emperor Maximin dispatched Menas to calm the disturbance and to root out the Christians from the city. Menas went and restored peace, but he declared himself a Christian and converted many pagans to the true Faith by his eloquence and many miracles. Hearing of this, the emperor sent Hermogenes to punish Menas and to smother Christianity. Hermogenes brought Menas to trial, cut off his feet and tongue, gouged out his eyes, and then cast him into prison. In prison, the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to Menas, healing and comforting His suffering servant. Seeing Menas miraculously healed, Hermogenes was baptized. He began to preach the powerful Christian Faith and was consecrated as Bishop of Alexandria. Then the enraged Maximin went to Alexandria himself and subjected Menas and Hermogenes to cruel tortures, which they courageously endured, helped by God's grace. Beholding the bravery of these soldiers of Christ and the miracles of God upon them, Eugraphus, secretary and friend of St. Menas, appeared before the tribunal and cried out to the emperor's face: "I too am a Christian!" The emperor became enraged, drew his sword and beheaded St. Eugraphus. Following this, the evil emperor ordered the executioner to behead St. Menas and St. Hermogenes. Their holy relics, thrown into the sea, miraculously floated to Constantinople, where the bishop, to whom this was revealed in a dream, solemnly met them and honorably buried them.

2. THE VENERABLE ANGELINA AND ST. JOVAN THE DESPOT

Angelina was the daughter of the Albanian prince, George Skenderbeg, and the wife of Stefan, Despot of Serbia, who was the son of Despot George. She endured exile with her husband and shared with him all the bitterness of life in Serbia as well as in Albania and Italy. She raised her sons Maxim and Jovan in a truly Christian spirit. Following the death of her husband, she was tonsured a nun, devoting herself entirely to prayer, acts of charity and the building and restoring of holy churches. A faithful wife, an excellent mother and a perfect Christian, she in truth merited the title "Mother Angelina," as the people call her even now. Her miracle-working relics, together with those of her righteous husband Stefan and her devoted sons Maxim and Jovan, rest in the Monastery of Kru edol (although some of the relics were destroyed by the Turks). She entered into rest and took up her habitation in the Immortal Kingdom at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR GEMELLUS

Gemellus was an honorable citizen of Ancyra. When Emperor Julian the Apostate came to this city, Gemellus came before him and openly denounced him for his apostasy. For this, he was tortured and crucified in the year 361. While in pain on the Cross, he heard a voice from heaven saying: "Blessed are you, Gemellus!"

4. THE VENERABLE THOMAS DEFOURKINOS [OF BITHYNIA]

Thomas was a great ascetic, a conqueror of demons, and a seer. Emperor Leo the Wise wrote him a letter, and he replied without even opening it. He entered into rest in the Lord in great old age in the ninth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE ANGELINA

The God-pleaser, holy Angelina,
Holy in marriage and also as a nun,
Patient in suffering, merciful in doing good,
Full of sorrow for another's sorrow-
She looked to God, her Comforter,
And was calmed by the Cross of Christ the Savior.
She was a comfort to her husband, an example to her children;
And the children of the holy mother became saints.
Whoever invokes the name of Mother Angelina
Will see all his suffering quickly fade away.
In a time of gloom, when the empire collapsed,
When many harmed their souls by sin,
When the darkness of the Turks encompassed the land,
Angelina saved the souls of the Serbs
By pointing to heaven with her finger and her spirit,
Consoling them with Christ, healing them by the Cross.
And now she hastens to every aching soul,
And with greater power she both heals and consoles.
Whoever invokes the name of Mother Angelina,
Will see all his suffering quickly fade away.

REFLECTION

In innumerable ways the Living Lord knows when to show mercy and when to chastise, when to deliver the faithful from temptations, when to turn unbelievers into believers, and when to punish incorrigible persecutors of the Faith. When the evil Maximin slew the wonderful martyrs of Christ, Menas, Hermogenes, and Euphrasius, he boarded a boat with his retinue and set sail from Alexandria for Byzantium. But suddenly he was blinded, being blind beforehand in soul and mind, and began to complain to those among his retinue of invisible hands that were harshly striking him. Shortly after that he died wickedly, just as he had lived. At the time of St. Ambrose the following incident occurred: The heretical Empress Justina had persuaded Euthymius, a landowner from Milan, to somehow seize the bishop, whom she hated, and to take him somewhere far away into exile. Euthymius prepared a cart and settled in a house near the church so that he could more easily catch sight of Ambrose alone and carry him off in the cart. And precisely on the day when he had arranged and prepared everything to seize Ambrose, an imperial order arrived that Euthymius immediately be exiled because of some crime. That day, the soldiers came, bound the malicious one, and took him off into exile in the very cart that he had prepared for Ambrose's banishment. On another occasion, an Arian entered the church where St. Ambrose was celebrating, with the intention of hearing from his mouth something for which Ambrose could be denounced. Looking around, this heretic saw God's saint instructing the people and beheld a shining angel alongside him, whispering words in his ear. Being greatly frightened by this, he became ashamed of himself, rejected the heresy and returned to Orthodoxy.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the deluge of the world (**Genesis 7**):

1. How there was a flood of corruption in the world before the water flooded the world;
2. How the long-suffering God permitted the flood because of the sins of mankind, and how the water flooded the entire earth.

HOMILY

-on Abraham-

I ... am but dust and ashes (Genesis 18:27).

These are the words that the righteous Abraham spoke of himself. Brethren, ridiculous are those people who pride themselves on their association with worldly princes and noblemen and begin to think highly of themselves. Abraham was found worthy to converse with the Eternal and Almighty King. Nevertheless, he remained unwavering in his humility, calling himself **dust and ashes**. Who was this Abraham, that he was found worthy of so much of God's favor in his lifetime and praise after his death, from the Apostle (**Galatians 3, Hebrews 11**), and even from the Lord Christ Himself (**Luke 16:22, John 8:39**)? He was a peasant who possessed all the virtues, living always according to the Law of God, a man with a firm faith in God, a lover of justice, hospitable, compassionate, courageous, obedient, pure and humble. However, Abraham is especially glorified for his faith, a powerful faith. Abraham was one hundred years old when God told him that his wife, barren until then, would bear a son, and he believed. And even before Sarah had given birth to Isaac, God said to Abraham: **I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16)**. Abraham believed and doubted not. And when an only son was born to Abraham, God commanded him, as a test, to offer his only son as a sacrifice. Abraham was prepared to do this, had God not turned him from it at the last moment. How complete was this wonderful man's faith and obedience to God! Therefore God blessed him and made him glorious on earth and in heaven. Brethren, blessed are they who, without hesitation, believe in God and fulfill His holy commandments. The blessing of God will accompany them in both worlds.

O our Blessed Creator, bless us sinners also and number us among Thine elect, who have a share with Abraham in Thy Kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE DANIEL THE STYLITE

Daniel was born in the village of Bethara near the city of Samosata in Mesopotamia of Christian parents, Elias and Martha. Through her tearful prayers, his barren mother received him from God, and as an only son he was dedicated to God from early childhood. Daniel embraced the monastic rank at the age of twelve, visited Simeon the Stylite, and was blessed by him. Desirous of solitude, Daniel left the monastery and withdrew to an abandoned pagan temple on the shore of the Black Sea. There he endured countless assaults from demons, but he conquered them all by perseverance, prayer and the sign of the Cross. Afterward he climbed up on a pillar. There he remained until his death, enduring both heat and cold, and attacks from both men and demons. Many disciples gathered around his pillar, and he directed them to eternal life by his example and his words. God rewarded His faithful servant with abundant grace while in this life, and he performed many miracles beneficial to men and prophesied future events. People from all parts crowded beneath his pillar, seeking help and counsel from the saint of God. Emperors and patriarchs as well as ordinary people came to him. Emperor Leo the Great brought his foreign guests, princes and nobles, and showed them St. Daniel on the pillar, saying to them: "Behold, the wonder in my kingdom!" Daniel foretold the day of his own death, instructed his disciples as a father to his sons, and took leave of them. At the time of his death, his disciples beheld angels, prophets, apostles and martyrs above his pillar. Having lived for eighty years, this holy angelic man entered into rest and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in the year 489.

2. THE VENERABLE LUKE THE STYLITE

Luke lived in Constantinople at the time of Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus. As a soldier, he participated in the war against the Bulgarians, in which he witnessed the death of many thousands of people, and from that war he emerged alive and unharmed. Seeing the finger of God in his deliverance, Luke scorned the vanity of the world and withdrew to a pillar near Chalcedon. There he lived a life of asceticism for forty-five years, cleansing his soul of all sinful desires and thoughts. Pleasing God, he entered into rest sometime between the years 970 and 980 and took up his habitation in a better life.

3. THE VENERABLE NICON THE DRY

As a monk in the Monastery of the Kiev Caves, he was enslaved by the Tartars. He lived for three years in captivity: shackled, tortured and mocked. When his kinsmen brought the money to ransom him from his master, he refused, saying: "If the Lord had wanted me to be free, He would not have delivered me into the hands of these lawless men." Once he told his master that Christ would free him in three days. The Tartar thought that this meant that his slave was going to escape, so he severed his tendons below the knees. However, on the third day, Nicon was indeed instantly carried to Kiev by an invisible hand. After a period of time, the Tartar came to Kiev and recognized Nicon, his former slave. He repented and was baptized. The former master became the servant and disciple of his former slave. Nicon was called "the Dry" because of the great austerity of his bodily fasting, and he was a great clairvoyant and miracle-worker. He entered peacefully into rest in the Lord on December 11, 1101.

4. THE HOLY MARTYR MIRAX

Mirax was an Egyptian. Deceived by a Moslem Emir, he embraced Islam. He later repented and entered a mosque with a cross. There he declared himself a Christian, calling upon the Moslems to forsake their falsehood and to accept the truth. He was tortured and beheaded in about the year 640.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE DANIEL THE STYLITE

When holy Daniel desired to die
He taught his disciples thus:
"My dear children, the fruit of my labor,
Affix your heart to the Living God,
Contemplate in spirit the Heavenly Father.
Glorify the wondrous Creator with praise.
Let humility be the first of your virtues;
The humble in heaven are God's noblemen.
Then show obedience, such as befits the humble.
These are two adornments of every true believer.
The humble and the obedient keep hospitality:
Be hospitable and magnanimous.
These are three virtues, and still more I will say:
Fasting, vigils, poverty-the path to eternal happiness.
Here are six candles in the earthly darkness,
And the seventh is love, the greatest of all."
Thus the saint spoke, and imparted his blessings,
Then rendered his holy soul to the Lord.
O holy Daniel, inhabitant of heaven,
Implore Christ for the needs of us sinners.

REFLECTION

The Lord preserveth all them that love him (Psalm 145:20). The lives of the saints confirm this as clearly as the sun. Certain envious priests complained to Patriarch Anatolius about St. Daniel, slandering him and saying that he was a magician. In essence, they were envious of the exceedingly young ascetic, who surpassed them in all the virtues and attracted many people to himself by his way of life. The patriarch summoned Daniel and examined him regarding his faith and his way of life. When Daniel told him everything, the patriarch rose from his seat, embraced him, praised him, and dismissed him in peace. Several days later, Patriarch Anatolius became ill, summoned Daniel and asked him to pray to God for his recovery. Daniel prayed to God, and the patriarch was immediately restored to health. Since the patriarch wanted to reward Daniel somehow, the young saint begged him to forgive his slanderers as his reward. To this the patriarch replied: "How can I not forgive them when they are the authors of so much good, namely, that I now know you and have received healing through you?" **Truly, the Lord preserves all who love Him, and He turns to their good the evil that men conceive against them.**

While St. Nikon the Dry was a slave among the Tartars, his master became sick and was at the point of death. Seeing that he would soon die, he ordered his sons to crucify Nikon at the head of his grave after his death. St. Nikon, discerning the future, saw that his cruel master would be baptized and prayed to God for his restoration to health. Contrary to all expectations, the Tartar recovered. Thus, by prayer, Nikon saved himself from physical death and his master from spiritual death.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the covenant that God made with the righteous Noah (**Genesis 9**):

1. How God blessed Noah and his sons after the flood;
2. How He promised that there would never again be a universal flood;
3. How He established the rainbow as a sign of that covenant.

HOMILY

-on Lot-

And Lot ... said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly (Genesis 19:7).

Lot, a righteous man among the unrighteous, lived in Sodom with his wife and two daughters. The faithful Abraham asked God: **Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? (Genesis 18:23).** God answered the faithful Abraham that not only would He not destroy the righteous, but if there were to be found ten righteous in that city, he would spare the entire city because of those ten. However, only one righteous man was found in Sodom-Lot-and he was a stranger. Just as before the flood there was only one righteous man in the world, Noah, so before the destruction of Sodom there was only one righteous man in that city, Lot. Lot was similar to his uncle Abraham in every virtue, notably in his obedience to God and his hospitality. The Sodomites hated him as a stranger and even more as a righteous man. **Brethren, do not so wickedly,** Lot exhorted them. He called the corrupt people his brethren in order to calm them and to remind them not to commit evil, in order to save them. But his brotherly words provoked them to even greater wrath. Lot was found worthy to have the angels of God visit him and deliver him from that corrupt city whose sins cried out to God. And the reprobates attacked the home of Lot to defile the sanctity of hospitality. **Brethren, do not so wickedly,** Lot implored them. But why would these brutes listen to a man if they did not fear God? That is why the angels of God punished them with blindness: **And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great (Genesis 19:11).** Then the angels led Lot from the city of the unrighteous and let loose a storm of brimstone and fire upon the city. Thus, the evil city perished, and the one righteous man in the city was saved. **Better is one righteous man than a thousand sinners (Sirach 16:3).**

O righteous God, Who never abandonest the righteous man, correct our unrighteousness and save us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 12 -

1. SAINT SPYRIDON THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF TREMITHUS

The island of Cyprus was both the birthplace and the place where this glorious saint served the Church. Spyridon was born of simple parents, farmers, and he remained simple and humble until his death. He married in his youth and had children, but when his wife died he devoted himself completely to the service of God. Because of his exceptional piety, he was chosen as bishop of the city of Tremithus. Yet even as a bishop he did not change his simple way of living, handling his livestock and cultivating his land himself. He used very little of the fruits of his labor for himself; instead, he distributed a greater share to the needy. He manifested great miracles by God's power: he brought down rain in time of drought, stopped the flow of a river, raised several people from the dead, healed Emperor Constantius of a grave illness, saw and heard angels of God, foresaw future events, discerned the secrets of men's hearts, converted many to the true Faith, and did much else. He took part in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea [325], and he brought many heretics back to Orthodoxy by his simple and clear expositions of the Faith as well as by his mighty miracles. He was so simply dressed that once, when he wanted to enter the imperial court at the invitation of the emperor, a soldier, thinking that he was a beggar, struck him on the face. Meek and guileless, Spyridon turned the other cheek to him. He glorified God through many miracles, and was of benefit, not only to many individuals but also to the whole Church of God. He entered into rest in the Lord in the year 348. His miracle-working relics rest on the island of Corfu, and even today they glorify God with many miracles.

2. THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR ALEXANDER, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

At first Alexander was the Bishop of Cappadocia, but during the persecution under Severus in the year 203 he was cast into prison and then exiled. Afterward he accepted the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem. He founded the famous Jerusalem Library, which Eusebius used when he wrote his Ecclesiastical History. He was tortured in various ways during the reign of Decius and thrown to wild beasts. Remaining alive and untouched by the beasts, he was cast into prison, where he ended his earthly life and went to the Lord in the year 251.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR SYNESIUS

As a young reader in Rome, he boldly preached the truth of Christ and denounced idolaters. For this, he was tortured and beheaded during the reign of Emperor Aurelian.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT SPYRIDON THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF TREMITHUS

Star of Cyprus and luminary of the Church,
Holy Spyridon, defender of the Faith,
Simple as a child, innocent as a child-
By his simplicity, he shines on the world.
What need is there for many words when speaking the truth?
Utterly simple is God's truth:
The Creator is One, in the Holy Trinity,
In the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit.
The Son descended to the sinful earth
And received flesh from the Pure Virgin
In order to save men, because He is the Lover of Mankind.
He performed many miracles
By divine power, for He is Almighty.
To mankind He gave a new rule,
The rule of love and the rule of faith.
Glorified, He now sits in heaven,
And gathers the fruit of His labor.
The sweet fruits of His labor
Are holy men and holy women.
He is the Rock of mankind's salvation;
Outside this Rock there is no salvation.
O Spyridon, O illuminator,
O soldier of Christ, pray for us.

REFLECTION

Absolutely nothing will help us if we are not lenient toward the weaknesses of men and forgive them. For how can we hope that God will forgive us if we do not forgive others? St. Spyridon once sold a hundred goats to a merchant at an agreed price, and the saint told the buyer to lay down the money. The buyer, knowing that Spyridon himself never counted money, handed over enough money for ninety-nine goats and hid the money for one. Spyridon then counted out a hundred goats for him. But when the merchant and his servants drove off the goats, one of them returned bleating. He drove it off, but it returned again. And so the goat continually returned to the enclosure, not wanting to go with the other goats. The saint then whispered into the merchant's ear: "Observe, my son: this animal is not doing this in vain. Did you perhaps withhold her price?" The merchant became ashamed and acknowledged his sin. As soon as he paid the amount he had concealed, the goat immediately joined the other goats.

On another occasion, some thieves entered Spyridon's sheepfold. When they had seized as many sheep as they wanted, they tried to leave the sheepfold, but an invisible force nailed them to the ground, and they were unable to move. At dawn, the bishop came to his sheepfold. Seeing the thieves, he reproached them mildly and instructed them to strive in the future to live by their own labors and not by thievery. He then took a sheep and gave it to them, saying, "Take this for your trouble, so that your all-night vigil not be in vain," and he dismissed them in peace.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Noah's blessing upon two of his children [Japheth and Shem] and a curse upon the third [Ham] (**Genesis 9**):

1. How Ham disclosed his father's nakedness, but Shem and Japheth covered it;
2. How Noah pronounced a blessing upon Shem and Japheth, but a curse upon the descendants of Ham.

HOMILY

-on Melchisedek-

Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7:17, 21).

Oh, how many hidden and faithful servants does the Lord have who serve Him day and night! Oh, how many shining comets are seen by men to cross the starry heavens, which appear unexpectedly, glistening, and then are lost in the vastness of the universe, leaving only tales about them! The righteous Abraham, with his descendants, is known to us like the starry heavens over our heads, but Melchisedek is known to us like a shining comet, which suddenly appeared, was bowed down to us by the starry heavens, and was again hidden in the unknown. Who is this Melchisedek? **The King of Salem ... the priest of the Most-high God (Genesis 14:18)**. He brought bread and wine to Abraham; he blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave him one-tenth of all that was his. When Abraham was so greatly blessed by God, how much more blessed was he who blessed Abraham? Oh, how unfathomable are the depths of God's providence! A man's thought extends from today until tomorrow, but the thought of God extends to the very end of time. According to the words of the Holy Apostle Paul, Melchisedek prefigures the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (**Hebrews 7:10**). For while the forefather Abraham was a wonderful and God-pleasing peasant, this Melchisedek was both a king and priest, as our Lord is King and Priest. Melchisedek offered Abraham bread and wine, and our Lord offered His Body and Blood to the entire human race. Abraham bowed down to Melchisedek and gave him a willing tribute. Abraham's true descendants, the Christians, bow down to the Lord Jesus and offer Him their willing sacrifice, a gift in return for a gift, the gift of His Body and Blood on the Cross. **And who shall declare His generation? (Isaiah 53:8)**. This refers to both Christ and Melchisedek. **Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it and was glad (John 8:56)**. Thus spoke the Lord to the Jews. How did Abraham see it? He saw it in the spirit. God revealed it to him, and he also saw the prefiguration of Christ in this glorious and wonderful Melchisedek, king, priest and servant of the Most-high God.

O Lord Jesus, bless us also as Thou didst bless Thy faithful servants, Melchisedek and Abraham.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS EUSTRATIUS, AUXENTIUS, EUGENE, MARDARIUS AND ORESTES

These five courageous men shone like five shining stars in the dark days of the Christ-persecuting Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. St. Eustratius was a Roman commander in the city of Satalionus; Eugene was his companion in the army; Orestes was likewise a distinguished soldier; Auxentius was a priest; and Mardarius was an ordinary citizen who came, like Eustratius, from the town of Arabrak. The imperial deputies Lysias and Agricola tortured Auxentius first since he was a priest. Seeing the innocent suffering of Christians, Eustratius appeared in front of Lysias and declared that he was also a Christian. While Eustratius was being tortured, Eugene appeared before the judge and cried out: "Lysias, I too am a Christian." When Eustratius was led through the town of Arabrak with the other martyrs, Mardarius saw them from the roof of his house. He took leave of his wife and two young children and rushed after the martyrs, shouting into the faces of the tormentors: "I too am a Christian, like my lord Eustratius." When St. Orestes was target-practicing in the presence of Lysias, the cross he was wearing fell from his chest and Lysias realized that he was a Christian, after which Orestes openly confessed his faith. Orestes was a young and handsome soldier and towered above all the other soldiers in stature. Auxentius was beheaded, Eugene and Mardarius died while being tortured, Orestes expired on a red-hot iron grid, and Eustratius died in a fiery furnace. St. Blaise (February 11) administered Holy Communion to St. Eustratius in prison before his death. Their relics were later taken to Constantinople and buried in the church dedicated to them: The Holy Five Companions. They were seen alive in that church, and St. Orestes appeared to St. Dimitri of Rostov (October 28). A beautiful prayer by St. Eustratius is extant, which is read at the Midnight Service on Saturday: "Most highly do I magnify Thee, O Lord."

2. THE HOLY MARTYR LUCY THE VIRGIN

With her mother, Lucy visited the grave of St. Agatha in Catania, where St. Agatha appeared to her. Her mother, who had dropsy, was then miraculously healed in the church. Lucy distributed all her goods to the poor, and this embittered her betrothed, who accused her of being a Christian before Paschasius the judge. The wicked judge ordered that she be taken to a brothel in order to defile her. However, by the power of God she remained immovable, as if rooted to the earth, and not even a multitude of people was able to move her from that spot. Then an enraged pagan pierced her throat with a sword and she gave up her soul to God and took up her habitation in the Kingdom of Eternity. Lucy suffered in the year 304.

3. THE HIEROMARTYR GAVRIL, PATRIARCH OF SERBIA

During the terrible period of Turkish rule over Serbia, this great hierarch traveled to Russia, where he participated in the Moscow Synod of 1655. Upon returning, he was accused of high treason. Certain evil Jews also accused him of having converted several Jews to the Christian Faith. In their accusation, the Jews cited that he was attempting to convert the Turks. The Jews did this to enrage the Turkish authorities even more. Brought before the tribunal, he was condemned and sentenced to embrace Islam. Since Gavril would not even hear of this, he was, after a period of imprisonment, sentenced to death and hanged in Brusa in the year 1659. Thus, he departed for his beloved Christ to receive from Him a double crown, that of a hierarch and that of a martyr.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS EUSTRATIUS, AUXENTIUS, EUGENE, MARDARIUS AND ORESTES

O Five Companions, soldiers of Christ,
Fearless heroes, honorable martyrs-
Mockery and tortures, fire and scaffolds
Were merely childish games for you.
None of you consented to the wantonness of Rome.
With joyful hearts you suffered for Christ.
Eustratius, the wonderful and heroic commander,
Despised imperial clemency and this weeping world.
With him, as with a living fire that burns leaves,
The other companions went to torture.
Auxentius the priest, a faithful servant of Christ,
Endured much mockery for the sake of Christ.
Eugene the soldier and wondrous Orestes
Ridiculed death, being conscious of the Resurrection.
Mardarius left his wife and children,
So that both they and he would be forever glorified.
O heroic clan, children of grace,
Only the Church can give such men as you;
Only the Spirit of God creates such hearts as yours-
He that transforms the dark abyss into flame!
Glorious martyrs, remember us also;
And by your prayers, strengthen the Church.

REFLECTION

To give alms out of that which one needs: this is true almsgiving. Not to sin when one is most exposed to sinning: this has value before God. When St. Lucy saw her sick mother miraculously healed, she suggested to her that she use her possessions as alms for the needy. To this her mother replied that she did not want to part from her possessions until her death, but she agreed that after her death her possessions could be used for the good that Lucy wished. "First, cover my eyes with earth," her mother said, "and then do what you wish with my possessions." Lucy said: "It is not very pleasing to God for a person to give to Him that which he cannot take with him to the grave or which he himself does not need. But if you want to do a God-pleasing deed, give to Him that which you yourself need. Otherwise, after death, when you need nothing, you will be offering Him that which you could not take with you. But while you are still alive and healthy, give to Christ what you possess, and all of that which you intended for me begin even now to give to Him." The good mother of the wise daughter agreed to this. When the torturer Paschasius was attempting to force this holy virgin to carnal sin, Lucy did not, even in thought, assent to this. And when the torturer threatened that his men would defile her by force, saying with a smirk, "When you become defiled, the Holy Spirit will flee from you," Lucy, full of grace, replied: "The body cannot be defiled without the consent of the mind." Thus St. Lucy went to her death, having distributed all her goods beforehand and guarded her young and pure body from defilement.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the fulfillment of Noah's words upon his descendants (**Genesis 9**):

1. How the sons of Japheth spread throughout the whole world;
2. How they settled in the tents of Shem, that is, in the Church, in the spiritual tent of Christ, which began with the Semites, the Jews.

HOMILY

-on Isaac-

And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee (Genesis 26:24).

Brethren, from time immemorial, the path upon which the righteous walk has always been difficult. From time immemorial, they have been hard pressed either by those who do not believe in God or by those who maintain an incorrect belief. Abel was hard pressed by his brother Cain; Noah and Lot, by a completely corrupt generation; and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, by the pagans. However, God does not forsake the righteous to walk the difficult path alone. This we also see with Isaac: **I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not.** Isaac understood these very meaningful words. By these words, God encouraged and reminded him. He was saying: "Because of Abraham, I will bless thee also; and, as I protected Abraham among the pagans, so in a like manner will I protect thee." And further: "Be faithful to Me as was Abraham thy father." Isaac followed the example of his father and did not turn away from God at any time in his life. Isaac was a farmer and a cattle-breeder as was his father; he was righteous and meek, avoiding strife with men and doing good for people. **We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee (Genesis 26:28)**, as his haters and persecutors finally had to admit. And Isaac was made worthy that God be called His God: just as God was called the God of Abraham, so later He was called the God of Isaac.

O Lord, wondrous in Thy saints, remember our names also along with the names of Thy righteous ones and saints in Thy Kingdom.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 14 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYRS THYRSUS, LEUCIUS AND CALLINICUS

Saints Thyrsus and Leucius were honorable citizens of Caesarea of Bithynia, the former being baptized and the latter being a Christian catechumen. Callinicus, however, was a pagan priest. When Emperor Decius's heir, Cumbricius, began to mercilessly torture and murder Christians, the fearless Leucius appeared before him and, reproaching him, said: "Why have you waged war against your own soul, O Cumbricius?" The enraged judge ordered that he be flogged, tortured and finally beheaded. The tortured Leucius went to his beheading as joyfully as if he were going to a wedding. Witnessing the death of the courageous Leucius, blessed Thyrsus, inflamed with divine zeal like that of Leucius, also appeared before the judge and reproached him for his evil crimes and for his unbelief in the One True God. He also was flogged and cast into prison. The invisible hand of God healed him of his wounds, opened the prison door and led him out. Thyrsus immediately went to Phileas, the Bishop of Caesarea, to be baptized by him. After his baptism, he was again seized and tortured, but he endured the tortures, bearing them as though in a dream and not in reality. By the power of his prayer, many idols fell down. The pagan priest Callinicus, upon seeing this, converted to the Christian Faith, and both he and Thyrsus were condemned to death. Callinicus was beheaded, and they placed Thyrsus in a wooden coffin to be sawn in half. However, the power of God would not permit this, and the saw was unable to cut into the wood. Then St. Thyrsus arose from the coffin and prayed to God, rendering Him thanks for the tortures, and he peacefully gave up his soul to his Lord. At the end of the fourth century, the Emperor Flavian built a church to St. Thyrsus near Constantinople and placed his holy relics in it. The saint appeared in a vision to Empress Pulcheria and counseled her to bury the relics of the Forty Martyrs alongside his.

2. THE HOLY MARTYRS PHILEMON, APOLLONIUS, ARIANUS AND OTHERS

During the reign of Diocletian, a certain judge Arianus cruelly persecuted the Christians of Egypt. He seized Apollonius and threatened him with tortures. Apollonius, afraid of the tortures, bribed a certain well-known pagan musician, Philemon, to offer sacrifices to the idols in his place, disguised in his clothes. When Philemon appeared before the idols, the light of the Christian Faith suddenly shone in his heart, and he made the sign of the Cross. After he came out of the temple, he began to shout: "I am a Christian! A servant of Christ the Living God!" Hearing this, the judge laughed, thinking that Philemon was mocking the Christians. Later, Philemon endured horrible tortures. Rain fell from heaven and baptized him. Finally, Philemon and Apollonius were beheaded by Arianus the judge. Then, because his blind eye was healed in a miraculous manner at Philemon's grave, Arianus himself became a Christian. Arianus was condemned to death by Emperor Diocletian and was slain with four soldiers who likewise declared themselves Christians.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYRS THYRSUS, LEUCIUS, AND CALLINICUS

**You knew the Faith, you acknowledged Christ,
You gave your bodies to save your souls:
For this your names shine in the heavens,
And an unquenchable fire glows in the Church.
Immortal heroes, pray for us,
That sinful clouds be turned away from us.
Blessed Leucius and noble Thyrsus,
Glorious Callinicus and worthy Philemon,
And the others in order, who endured grievous torments-
Now you are citizens of a better universe.
O beautiful beacons, pray for us;
Martyrs of God, pray for the Church.
You knew love, a heavenly possession,
The earth knew it not, not even its true name;
You saw it wholly in the Son of God,
In the sign of the Crucifixion and in His bloody brow.
Now, you are near to God and behold His face.
You cover our sins by your prayers.**

REFLECTION

There are three types of praiseworthy zeal: zeal in cleansing oneself of sinful desires and thoughts, zeal for the truth of the Faith, and zeal for God's justice among men. All three of these filled the soul of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker to perfection. He showed zeal in purifying himself throughout his life, vigilantly guarding over his heart. He especially showed zeal for the truth of the Faith at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea [325] when he entered into a fearful confrontation with Arius. His zeal for God's justice among men was seen particularly in two notable events, when on each occasion he saved three innocent men from the punishment of death. Once, in his absence from the city of Myra, the avaricious commander Eustathius condemned three men to be beheaded, receiving a bribe for this from some of their enemies. Informed of this, St. Nicholas returned to Myra with the greatest haste. The condemned men had already been brought to the place of execution, and the executioner had already raised the sword over the innocent men. At that moment, Nicholas grabbed the sword, pulled it out of the executioner's hand, and freed the condemned men. Afterward, he rebuked the commander Eustathius and brought him to shame and repentance. In a similar way, three imperial commanders-Nepotian, Ursus and Herpylion-were slandered before Eulavius the Eparch of Constantinople and before the emperor himself. The emperor signed their death sentence. On the eve of their execution, the three commanders prayed to God, saying: "O God of Nicholas, deliver us innocent ones from death!" That night, St. Nicholas appeared to both the emperor and the eparch in a dream, rebuked them for this injustice, and ordered them to free the three commanders from prison immediately. The next day, the emperor and eparch each related to the other the same dream and they immediately freed the commanders, both from the death sentence and from prison.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Abraham's obedience:

1. How Abraham obeyed God when He ordered him to go out from his country, his kindred and his father's house (**Genesis 12**);
2. How He obeyed God when He commanded him to offer his only son as a sacrifice (**Genesis 22**).

HOMILY

-on Jacob-

For I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved (Genesis 32:30).

The God of Abraham and Isaac is also the God of Jacob the faithful, the obedient, the merciful and the meek. The meek beholder of God, Jacob, can be called the "one who saw God." For in truth he was meek, and he saw God and spoke with God, and he saw the angels of God and the ladder from earth to heaven. By his meekness he defeated Laban his father-in-law, and Esau his brother; by his meekness he made peace between his wives, Leah and Rachel; for his meekness he was even dear to pharaoh. Jacob's meekness is a prefiguration of the meekness of Christ. **Blessed are the meek**, said the Lord, **for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5)**. These words were also realized in Jacob. He inherited the land of his fathers; his descendants were delivered from Egypt and inherited the Promised Land; through Christ the Lord, his descendant according to the flesh, he inherited the whole earth, that is, the Church of God which spread over the entire world. **I have seen God face to face**. Jacob saw God in the form of man but not as true man. And even this vision was only a prefiguring of the true Incarnation of God as man. **And my life is preserved**. His soul was preserved from fear and from every unrighteousness. If Jacob was preserved by only seeing a vision of God, how much easier is it for us to be preserved who know God as true man and as the God-man.

O meek Lord, the strength and glory of the meek, as Thou didst preserve Jacob by Thy vision, preserve us also by Thy true Body and Blood.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR ELEUTHERIUS

From a good tree comes good fruit. This wonderful saint had noble and greatly eminent parents. Eleutherius was born in Rome, where his father was an imperial proconsul. His mother Anthia heard the Gospel from the great Apostle Paul and was baptized by him. Having been left a widow early, she entrusted her only son for study and service to Anicetus the Bishop of Rome. Seeing how Eleutherius was gifted by God and illumined by the grace of God, the bishop ordained him a deacon at the age of fifteen, a priest at the age of eighteen, and a bishop at the age of twenty. Eleutherius's God-given wisdom made up for what he lacked in years, and this chosen one of God was appointed Bishop of Illyria with his seat in Valona (Avlona), Albania. The good shepherd guarded his flock well and increased their number day by day. Emperor Hadrian, a persecutor of Christians, sent the commander Felix with soldiers to seize Eleutherius and bring him to Rome. When the raging Felix arrived in Valona and entered the church, he saw and heard the holy hierarch of God; suddenly his heart changed, and he became a Christian. Eleutherius baptized Felix and departed for Rome with him, returning joyfully as if he were going to a feast and not to trial and torture. The emperor subjected the noble Eleutherius to harsh torture: flogging, roasting on an iron bed, boiling in pitch, and burning in a fiery furnace. But Eleutherius was delivered from all these deadly tortures by God's power. Seeing all this, Caribus the Roman eparch declared that he also was a Christian. Caribus was tortured and then beheaded, and so was Blessed Felix. Finally, the imperial executioners cut off the honorable head of St. Eleutherius. When his mother, the holy Anthia, came and stood over the dead body of her son, she also was beheaded. Their bodies were translated to Valona, where even today St. Eleutherius glorifies the name of Christ by his many miracles. He suffered during the reign of Hadrian in the year 120.

2. SAINT STEPHEN THE CONFESSOR OF SOUROZH

Stephen was born in Cappadocia and educated in Constantinople under the Patriarch, St. Germanus. He withdrew into solitude and lived hidden from the world. An angel appeared to St. Germanus and ordered him to appoint Stephen bishop of the town of Sourozh (now Sudak in the Crimea), and the patriarch did so. The zealous Stephen converted many to Christianity. He suffered bitterly under Emperor Leo the Isaurian for the sake of icons. He prophesied to the emperor his impending death. Following this wicked emperor's evil death, Stephen was returned to his diocese, where he fed his God-pleasing flock and died peacefully at the end of the eighth century.

3. THE VENERABLE PAUL OF LATROS

Paul was born in Pergamum. He lived a life of asceticism on a mountain called Latros in Asia Minor. Glorified because of his asceticism and many miracles, he entered peacefully into rest in old age and took up his habitation with the Lord in the year 950.

4. THE VENERABLE PARDUS THE HERMIT

In his youth Pardus was a cart-driver, but because of an unintentional sin, he left the world and withdrew to the desert to live in asceticism. He lived in Palestine in the sixth century.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR ELEUTHERIUS

Eleutherius, saint of God,
You did not conceal God's truth from men,
But with God's truth you enlightened men
And offered salvation to each and all.
Let the Church of God rejoice;
Let all of Illyria rejoice.
Behold, God sent to her a wonderful man:
Eleutherius, a true saint.
His very name means ``freedom":
Eleutherius bears freedom,
True freedom from the slavery of sin.
True freedom does not exist without Christ.
Let the town of Valona also rejoice.
In her the relics of the saint repose:
Miraculous relics that heal the sick,
A flame from which the demons flee.
Blessed is the mother who gives birth to a saint.
St. Anthia, thrice blessed,
Now is comforted in the garden of Paradise,
And gazes upon her son, Eleutherius.
O Eleutherius, pray for us,
That the gracious God may have mercy on us also.

REFLECTION

For unintentional murder, the earthly court frees the murderer. The Church, however, imposes a penance on someone who commits murder unintentionally: a penance much lighter than that for a voluntary murder, but does not leave him without a penance. If a priest kills unintentionally, the Church places him under a lifelong suspension of priestly functions. Christians with sensitive souls and keen consciences impose upon themselves a more difficult penance than the Church would impose. St. Pardus once came to Jericho as a cart-driver. Leaving his mules in front of an inn, he entered it. At that moment, a child fell under the mule, and the mule trampled the child with its hooves and killed it. When Pardus saw the bloody and dead child killed by his mule, he was so crushed in heart that he felt himself intentionally responsible for the child's death. And this man of conscience imposed the harshest penance upon himself. He abandoned his trade, left the world and, even though he was relatively young, withdrew to the harsh wilderness, where he undertook a life of difficult asceticism consisting of physical and spiritual labor and repentance. With many tears, he offered repentance to God for the murder of the child. He desired to pay for the life of the child with his own life, and he prayed to God that He would somehow make this possible. He teased a lion so that the lion would tear him apart, but the lion fled from him. He lay on the narrow path on which the lion walked so that he would be killed by the beast, but the lion leapt over him and would not touch him. Seeing, therefore, that it was God's will for him to live and not perish, he was at peace with himself but remained a contrite penitent until his death. Is not this a sensitive, man-loving and God-fearing soul? Is not this the refined and sharpened conscience of a true Christian?

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the powerful faith of Abraham (**Genesis 15**):

1. How God promised the childless and aged Abraham many descendants;
2. How God promised him as many descendants as the stars in the heavens;
3. How Abraham believed God, despite everything, and how God counted this for righteousness.

HOMILY

-on Joseph-

And Joseph left his garment in her hand, and fled outdoors (Genesis 39:12).

The innocent and chaste Joseph endured two great and difficult temptations and overcame them: the temptation of wicked envy on the part of his blood brothers, and the temptation of adulterous passion from the Egyptian temptress. Jealousy sold him as a slave, and the passion of adultery drove the innocent one to prison. In both cases he returned good for evil: he gave food to his hungry brothers and preserved the life, throne and people of frightened Pharaoh. His brothers thought to slay him, but God saved him; the adulterous woman thought to destroy him, but God saved him. Out of slavery and imprisonment, God crowned him with glory and unlimited authority. And him whom his evil brothers could have killed with one stroke and whom Potiphar's powerful wife could have crushed in an instant, God made the unlimited master over the lives of millions of people and the only nourisher of his starving brothers. Such is the wondrous mercy of God toward the righteous. Thus does the Lord know how to save and glorify the innocent and the chaste. In the greatness of the destiny of Joseph, we see the greatness of God's mercy. There is one eye that never sleeps, my brethren. Let us cling to God and not fear anyone. Let us be innocent and chaste and not fear evil, or slander, or prison, or ridicule, or misfortune. On the contrary, let us rejoice when all of this befalls us because of our innocence and chastity; let us rejoice and await with faith the revelation of God's wonders toward us. Let us, in every storm, await the thunder of God's justice-and afterward the calm.

O mysterious Lord, Who secretly but vigilantly accompanies the righteous in slavery and in prison, and manifests Thy mercy in Thine own time, help us to be innocent and chaste.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET HAGGAI

Haggai was born in Babylon during the time of the captivity of Israel. He was of the tribe of Levi and prophesied about 470 years before Christ. As a youth, he visited Jerusalem. He urged Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest to restore the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, prophesying for this Temple greater glory than the former Temple of Solomon, **The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts (Haggai 2:9)**, for the Lord and Savior was to appear in this new temple. He lived long enough to see one part of the temple built by Zerubbabel. He died in old age and joined his ancestors.

2. SAINT NICHOLAS CHRYSOVERGES, PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Nicholas governed the Church from 980 until 995. He ordained the great Simeon the New Theologian a presbyter when this spiritual giant was elected abbot of the Monastery of the Holy Martyr Mamas in Constantinople. During his times, a miraculous appearance of the Archangel Gabriel took place at Karyes [Mount Athos]. On this occasion, the archangel taught the monks to praise the Most-holy Theotokos with the hymn ``It Is Truly Meet," writing this hymn on a stone in a chapel of one of the kellia, which from that time has been called ``It Is Truly Meet" (June 13). As an eminent and great hierarch, he peacefully entered into rest and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of God.

3. SAINT THEOPHANO THE EMPRESS

Theophano was born of eminent parents, Constantine and Anna, who were kin to several emperors. Her parents were childless for a long time and prayed to the Most-holy Theotokos to give them an offspring. And God gave them this daughter, Theophano. Imbued with the Christian spirit from her childhood, Theophano surpassed all her companions in all the Christian virtues. When she grew up, she entered into marriage with Leo, the son of Emperor Basil the Macedonian. She endured great hardships alongside her husband. Responding to slander-that Leo carried a knife in his boot and planned to kill his father at an opportune time-the gullible father, Basil, locked his son and daughter-in-law in prison. Thus, two innocent souls languished in prison for three years. Once, during the Feast of the Prophet Elias, the emperor summoned all his noblemen to his court for a banquet. Suddenly the emperor's parrot unexpectedly spoke these words, ``Alas, alas, my Lord Leo!" and repeated these words a number of times. This brought great anxiety to all of the imperial noblemen, and they all begged the emperor to release his son and daughter-in-law. The grieved emperor did so. After his father's death, Leo became emperor and was called ``the Wise." Theophano did not consider her imperial dignity as anything, but, completely devoted to God, she cared only about the salvation of her soul, fasting and praying, distributing many alms, and restoring many monasteries and churches. Neither an untrue word nor an excessive word nor, least of all, slander proceeded from her lips. Before her death she called all her closest friends, took leave of them and gave up her soul to her God in the year 892. The Emperor Leo wanted to build a church over her grave in her name, but since the patriarch objected to this, he built a church to All Saints, saying that if Theophano became a saint, she would be glorified together with the other saints. The Feast of All Saints was then instituted to be celebrated on the Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT THEOPHANO THE EMPRESS

From a royal throne, it is better seen:
The vanity of the world, clever vanity,
And the imperial throne is mercilessly struck
By the tumultuous waves of this world.
Theophano clearly examines
The insane, open sea of this world,
And her heart, her troubled heart,
Is firmly anchored to the Living God.
The kings of this world-are they kings?
They are but many sentries on a quick rotation!
Death counts and carries out the change of these sentries-
Kings of the world: passing shadows!
Theophano, like the wise virgins,
The lamp of her heart lit by the spirit,
Illumined the path with a wonderful light,
Happily avoiding the pits of sin.
Now blessed in the Eternal Kingdom,
Among the stars, and shining like one,
Where there is no pain or change,
Theophano now reigns.

REFLECTION

The saints exerted great effort to subdue pride and selfishness in themselves and to accustom themselves to complete obedience and devotion, be it to their superiors when they had them, or to God Himself. The Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified was distinguished by exceptional discipline, order and uncomplaining obedience. When St. John Damascene entered this monastery, not one of the eminent spiritual fathers would venture to take such a famous nobleman and writer as his novice. Then the abbot handed him over to a simple but strict elder. The elder ordered John not to do anything without his knowledge or approval. In the meantime it happened that a monk died who had a brother in this same monastery. The monk was in unspeakable grief over the death of his brother. For the sake of comforting the inconsolable brother, John wrote stichera for the departed monk-famous hymns that the Church uses even today at the funeral service. After composing them, John began to chant the hymns. When the elder heard the chanting, he became enraged and drove John away. Some of the brethren, hearing of John's banishment, dared to go to the elder to beg him to forgive John and receive him back, but the elder remained unwavering. John wept bitterly and lamented because he had transgressed his elder's command. Once again the brethren, on John's behalf, begged the elder to impose a penance on him and after that forgive him. The elder then imposed the following penance upon his disciple: to clean and wash all the lavatories of every cell in the monastery with his own hands if he desired forgiveness. The sorrowful brethren reported this to John, thinking that he would leave the monastery rather than do this. But when John heard the elder's message, he rejoiced greatly and with much joy carried out the elder's command. Upon seeing this, the elder wept, embraced John and said through his tears: "Oh, what a sufferer for Christ have I given birth to! Oh, what a true son of holy obedience this man is!"

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the generosity of Abraham (**Genesis 13, 14**):

1. How Abraham did not want to quarrel with Lot because of the strife between their herdsmen but rather suggested that they separate;
2. How, before parting, he left it to Lot to choose which direction, be it to the left or the right;
3. How Abraham, defeating the King of Sodom, refused the offered goods and would not take even a thread or sandal strap.

HOMILY

-on Moses-

Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3).

A chosen man, a great wonderworker, a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in his miracles, a victor in Egypt, a victor in the wilderness, the leader of a people-how could he not be proud? But if he had become proud, Moses would not have been all that he was. They become proud who think that they do their own works and not God's in this world, and who think that they work by their own power and not by God's power. But the great Moses knew that he was the doer of God's works, and that the power with which He did them was God's power and not his. That is why he did not become proud because of the awesome miracles he performed, or the great victories he obtained, or the wise laws that he gave to the people. **The Lord is my strength and my song (Exodus 15:2)**, said Moses. Of the entire assembly of the Israelites in the wilderness, no one felt his own particular weakness as much as he, the greatest one of that assembly. In every task, in every place and in every moment, he expected help only from God. "What shall I do?" he cried to God, and he ceaselessly listened for God's reply and sought God's power. "Meek above all men on earth." For all the others considered themselves as being something, trusted themselves as being something, but he-nothing. He was completely absorbed in God, completely humbled before God. If the people needed to be fed and given drink, he turned to God; if it was necessary to do battle with his enemies, he raised his hands to heaven; if it was necessary to calm an uprising among the people, he cried to God. The meek, the all-meek Moses! And God rewarded his faithful servant with great glory and made him worthy to appear on Mount Tabor with Elias alongside the Lord Savior.

O Lord, the God of the meek, the Good Shepherd, make us also meek like Moses and the apostles.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROPHET DANIEL AND THE THREE CHILDREN: ANANIAS, AZARIAS AND MISAEAL

All four were of the royal tribe of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed and plundered Jerusalem, Daniel, as a boy, was carried away into slavery together with the Jewish King Jehoiachim and countless other Israelites. An account of his life, sufferings and prophecies can be found in detail in his book. Completely devoted to God, St. Daniel from his early youth received from God the gift of great discernment. His fame among the Jews in Babylon began when he denounced two lecherous and unrighteous elders, Jewish judges, and saved the chaste Susanna from an unjust death. But his fame among the Babylonians began from the day he deciphered and interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. For this, the king made him a prince at his court. When the king made a golden idol on the Plain of Dura, the Three Children refused to worship it, and for this they were cast into a fiery furnace. But an angel of God appeared in the furnace and cooled the fire so that the children walked around the furnace unharmed by the fire, singing: **Blessed art Thou, Lord God of our fathers (Daniel 3:26)**. The king saw this miracle and was amazed. He then brought the children out of the furnace and bestowed upon them great honors.

In the time of King Belshazzar, when the king was eating and drinking with his guests at a banquet from consecrated vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, an invisible hand wrote three words on the wall: **Mene, Tekel, Upharsin (Daniel 5:25-28)**. No one was able to interpret these words except Daniel. That night, King Belshazzar was killed. Daniel was twice thrown into the lions' den because of his faith in the One, Living God, and both times the Lord saved him and he remained alive. Daniel beheld God on a throne with the heavenly hosts; saw angels; discerned the future of certain people, of kingdoms, and of the whole human race; and prophesied the time of the coming of the Savior on earth. According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, Daniel and the three children lived to old age in Babylon and were beheaded for the true Faith. When they beheaded Ananias, Azarias stretched out his cloak and caught his head; following this, Misael caught Azarias's head and Daniel caught Misael's head. An angel of the God translated their bodies to Judea, to Mount Gebal, and placed them under a rock. According to tradition, these four God-pleasers arose at the time of the death of the Lord Christ, appeared to many and again fell asleep. Daniel is numbered among the four great prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel). He lived and prophesied five hundred years before Christ.

2. THE VENERABLE DANIEL (DUNALE)

Daniel was a nobleman and governor of the island of Nivertum near Cadiz in Spain. Realizing the vanity of this world, he renounced both honors and riches and went to Rome, where he was tonsured a monk. After this, he went to Constantinople, where he spoke with the Emperors Constantine and Romanus Porphyrogenitus, and then he set off for Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, he received the great schema at the hands of Patriarch Christodoulos, who gave him the name Stephen. Mistreated by the Saracens, who forced him to shave off his beard, he withdrew to Egypt, where he endured much suffering and finally died for the name of Christ. He took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ toward the end of the tenth century.

3. THE VENERABLE NEW MARTYRS PAISIUS AND HABAKKUK

Paisius was abbot of the Travna Monastery near Chachak in Serbia, and Habakkuk was his companion and deacon. As Christians, both were impaled on stakes by the Turks on Kalemegdan in Belgrade on December 17, 1814. Carrying his stake through the streets of Belgrade, the courageous Habakkuk sang. When his mother begged him with tears to embrace Islam in order to save his life, this wonderful soldier of Christ replied to her:

My mother, thank you for your milk,
But for your counsel I thank you not:
A Serb is Christ's; he rejoices in death.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROPHET DANIEL AND THE THREE CHILDREN

Whoever fears the true God
Is not afraid of men or demons.
The Lord rewards faithful servants
And guards them from every evil.
Among the lions,
Holy Daniel remained unharmed;
In the fiery furnace,
The Three Children remained alive;
In the midst of the fire, they glorified God,
With an angel, God's messenger.
Like Noah in the evil world,
Like holy Lot in wild Sodom,
And like Joseph in decadent Egypt,
So Daniel in the middle of Babylon
Remained faithful and righteous
With three of his young friends:
Ananias and Azarias
And the faithful young Misael.
The tortures came and the tortures passed.
The martyred were gloriously glorified
In the Immortal Kingdom of Christ.

REFLECTION

Bodily purity is primarily attained by fasting, and, through bodily purity, spiritual purity is also attained. Abstinence from food, according to the words of that son of grace, St. Ephraim the Syrian, means: "Not to desire or ask for various foods, either sweet or costly; not to eat anything outside the designated time; not to succumb to the spirit of gluttony; not to excite hunger in oneself by looking at good food; and not to desire at one moment one kind of food and at another moment another kind of food." Great is the fallacy that fasting and Lenten food harm the health of the body. It is a known fact that the ascetics lived the longest and were the least prone to illness. St. Daniel and the Three Children in Babylon offer us an example of this. When the king ordered his eunuch to feed these young men food from the royal table and to give them good wine to drink, Daniel told the eunuch that they did not want to accept the royal food and wine but wanted only vegetables for food (for Daniel did not want to eat the food sprinkled with the blood of the idolatrous sacrifices). The eunuch, fearing that the youths would be weakened by the fasting foods, related his fear to Daniel. Then the prophet suggested that he make a test and convince himself that the fasting food would not weaken them: to nourish the other youths at the royal court with food from the king's table, and to feed the four of them only on pulse for the course of ten days, and then make a comparison. The eunuch heeded Daniel and did what he suggested. After ten days, the faces of the four ascetic youths were more radiant and their bodies were stronger than the bodies of the Babylonian youths who ate and drank from the king's table.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the hospitality and confession of Abraham (**Genesis 18**):

1. How Abraham saw three men (angels) approaching and ran out to meet them, invited them to his home and entertained them;
2. How he prayed to God to spare Sodom for the sake of the righteous who were in that city.

HOMILY

-on Joshua the son of Nun-

Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left ... be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:7, 9).

Joshua the son of Nun obeyed the Lord in everything to the end, not turning either to the right or to the left of the Lord's commandments. He was surrounded by great horrors and fears while leading the people through an unknown land and through thick ranks of enemies, but he was neither afraid nor dismayed. He considered himself the weapon of God, and knew that his battles were God's battles. As a faithful soldier obeys the commands of his commander, so Joshua listened for and hearkened to the will of the Living God. He did not ascribe any good thing, any power, any merit to himself, but he ascribed all to God and only to God. He did not depend in the least on his own army, his own weapons and his own wisdom, but he depended on God and only on God, the Almighty and All-wise. See, brethren, with what sort of men God walks. Oh, if only Christian rulers and commanders could see this and learn from God's servant Joshua how to serve God! Oh, if they would understand, once and for all, that the people are best served when God is served; and that the people cannot be served if God is not served! The Lord God fulfilled His promise and was with Joshua the son of Nun to the end of his labors and life. And that the Lord was with him is shown by the great and awesome miracles that He manifested through His faithful servant. God divided the river Jordan so that the people crossed over on dry land without a bridge; God made the walls of Jericho fall at the sound of the trumpet; God delivered powerful enemies into the hands of the Israelites; God caused the sun to stand still over Gibeon and the moon to stand still over the valley of Ajalon. Truly, never and nowhere did God forsake His servant Joshua, for Joshua did not leave unfulfilled a single commandment of God. A witness of the Living God and a type of the Savior of the world, when he was old and stricken in years, he instructed his people as God had taught him in the beginning: **Turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left... but cleave unto the Lord your God (Joshua 23:6, 8).**

O Lord Jesus, Son of God, Who showed most glorious wonders through Joshua, the son of Nun, Thy faithful servant, strengthen and encourage us that we not turn away from Thee, either to the right or to the left, for the sake of Thy glory and our salvation.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR SEBASTIAN AND THOSE WITH HIM

This glorious saint was born in Italy and brought up in the city of Milan. While still young, he dedicated himself to military service. Being educated, handsome and courageous, he received the favor of Emperor Diocletian, who appointed him captain of his imperial guard. Secretly he confessed the Christian Faith and prayed to the Living God. As an honorable, just and merciful man, Sebastian was greatly beloved by his soldiers. Whenever he could, he saved Christians from torture and death, and, when he was unable to do so, he exhorted them to die for Christ the Living God without turning back. Two brothers, Marcus and Marcellinus, who had been imprisoned for Christ and were already on the verge of denouncing Him and worshiping idols, were confirmed in the Faith by Sebastian, who strengthened them for martyrdom. As he spoke with them, encouraging them not to fear death for Christ, his face was illumined. Everyone saw his shining face, like that of an angel of God. Sebastian also confirmed his words by miracles: he healed Zoe, the jailer Nicostratus's wife, who had been mute for six years; he brought her, Nicostratus and his entire household to baptism; he healed the two ailing sons of Claudius the commander and brought him and his household to baptism; he healed Tranquillinus, the father of Marcus and Marcellinus, of gout and pains in his legs which had troubled him for eleven years, and brought him to baptism together with his entire household; he healed the Roman eparch Chromatius of the same illness and brought him and his son Tiburtius to baptism. The first of them to suffer was St. Zoe, whom they seized at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, where she was praying to God. After torturing her, they threw her into the Tiber River. They then seized Tiburtius, and the judge placed live coals before him, telling him to choose between life and death, that is, either to cast incense on the coals and to cense the idols or to stand barefoot on the hot coals. St. Tiburtius made the sign of the Cross, stood barefoot on the hot coals, and remained unharmed. After this, he was beheaded. Nicostratus was killed with a stake, Tranquillinus was drowned, and Marcus and Marcellinus were tortured and pierced with spears. Then Sebastian was brought before Emperor Diocletian. The emperor rebuked him for his betrayal, but Sebastian said: "I have always prayed to my Christ for your health and for the peace of the Roman Empire." The emperor ordered that he be stripped naked and shot through with arrows. The soldiers shot him through with arrows until the martyr was so completely covered with arrows that his body was not seen because of them. When all thought that he was dead, he appeared alive and completely healthy. Then the pagans killed him with staves. He suffered gloriously for Christ his Lord and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in the year 287 at the time of Diocletian the Emperor and Gaius the Bishop of Rome.

2. SAINT FLORUS, BISHOP OF AMISUS

Florus lived at the time of the Emperors Justin II and Maurice (565-602). He was the son of nobles. He renounced the commotion and vanity of the world and withdrew to a monastery in order to live a life of asceticism for the salvation of his soul. Later he was chosen bishop of the town of Amisus in the province of Cappadocia. And as an ascetic and a hierarch, Florus pleased God, and he peacefully took up his habitation in the Kingdom of God.

3. SAINT MODESTUS, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Modestus was only five months old when his parents died, but by God's providence he was brought up in the spirit of Christianity. When he became an adult, he was sold as a slave to a pagan in Egypt. However, he succeeded in converting his master to the Christian Faith, and his master granted him freedom. Modestus withdrew to Mount Sinai, where he lived a life of asceticism until the age of fifty-nine. He was then chosen as Patriarch of Jerusalem and fed the flock of Christ as a true shepherd. He entered peacefully into rest in the year 633, at the age of ninety-seven.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR SEBASTIAN

Holy Sebastian was covered with arrows-
With a hair shirt of arrows his body was clothed.
But, beneath the arrows, his soul was unscathed;
His heart was raised to the heavens in prayer.
Sebastian endured suffering for Christ.
What are mighty kingdoms, what are great riches,
Compared with this honor, compared with this illumination-
To be struck by arrows for the sake of the Living God?
Wonderful Sebastian desired this:
To be crucified for the crucified Savior,
To confirm the truth by suffering and blood,
To witness the Faith before heaven and earth.
The All-seeing Lord, Who sees all creation,
Measured and counted every drop of blood,
And rewarded Sebastian in the Eternal Kingdom,
Showering him with blessings without measure.
O Martyr most-glorious, who suffered for Christ,
And by your suffering enlarged the Church:
Pray to God for the Church on earth,
That it become ever more beautiful, and all the more great.

REFLECTION

In this life, man is given a choice: either the earthly kingdom or the Kingdom of Heaven. God imposes no pressure on this choice, but each one freely decides. When the brothers Marcus and Marcellinus were condemned to death, the pagan judge allowed them a month to contemplate either renouncing Christ and His Kingdom or being put to death. Then their kinsmen came to the prison with one kind of advice, and St. Sebastian with another. The kinsmen wept and implored them to do as the judge willed and to spare their youth. Their tearful father showed them his gray hairs and his infirmity; their mother swore by the food of her breasts by which she nourished them; their children wept around them. In essence, all of them proposed that they should renounce the Heavenly Kingdom for the sake of the earthly kingdom, but St. Sebastian counseled them to the contrary, saying: "O courageous soldiers of Christ, do you want to lose the eternal wreath for the sake of the flattery of your kinsmen? Do you want to relinquish the victorious banner for the sake of women's tears? This life is transient; it is so unstable and unfaithful that it can never save even those who love it. What is this life worth even if one lives for a hundred years? When the last day arrives, do not all our past years and all earthly delights seem as though they had never existed? It is indeed unreasonable to fear to lose this quickly passing life, when one will receive that eternal life in which delights, riches and rejoicing begin and never end, remaining eternal to the ages of ages. Remember the Lord's words: **A man's foes shall be they of his own household.**" With these and many other words, St. Sebastian prevailed. The holy martyrs loved the Kingdom of Heaven more than the earthly kingdom, and they joyfully went to their deaths for Christ.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Joseph's chastity (**Genesis 39**):

1. How Potiphar's lustful wife urged Joseph to sin;
2. How Joseph rejected her out of fear of God and respect for his master;
3. How the woman grabbed his garment, but he left the garment and fled naked with his holy soul.

HOMILY

-on Ruth-

Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God ... naught but death shall part thee and me (Ruth 1:16,17).

These are wonderful words, whether they are spoken by a son to a father, a daughter to a mother, or a wife to a husband. But they are three times more wonderful when a daughter-in-law says them to her mother-in-law. Blessed Ruth spoke these words to Naomi, her sorrowful mother-in-law. When both of Naomi's sons died in the land of Moab, where they lived as immigrants, the aged mother wanted to return to Bethlehem, her native land, and there to lay her bones to rest. And Naomi, noble in her grief, counseled her young daughters-in-law to remain in their own land and to remarry. Orpah remained, but Ruth said: **Naught but death shall part thee and me.** Behold a most beautiful example of how a mother-in-law can tenderly love her daughters-in-law, and again how a daughter-in-law can be wholeheartedly devoted to her mother-in-law. But in Bethlehem someone had to feed these two souls. Who would feed them? God and the diligent hands of Ruth. **Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn (Ruth 2:2)**, said the daughter-in-law to the mother-in-law. And Naomi replied: **Go, my daughter (Ruth 2:3).** In a strange field, with strange reapers, she had to glean the ears of grain. That was not only toil but also shame. However, Ruth took upon herself both toil and shame out of love for her aged mother-in-law. The All-seeing God saw these two sweet souls and rejoiced. Their Creator rejoiced and rewarded and glorified them, as only He knows how to reward and glorify those who fear Him. And God, in His providence, provided that Ruth should enter the field of the wealthy Boaz to gather the gleaned ears of grain, and Boaz saw Ruth and asked Naomi for her hand in marriage. Of this marriage was born Obed, the father of Jesse and grandfather of David the King. So it was that Ruth had humbled herself to being a beggar but God made her the ancestress of the great king (David), from whom came many kings and finally the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ.

O All-seeing and Gracious Lord, how wonderful art Thou in Thy providence toward the righteous and the merciful. Do Thou guide us also and have mercy on us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR BONIFACE

Martyrdom for Christ makes a saint out of a sinner. The example of St. Boniface shows this. At first, he was a servant in Rome to a wealthy and immoral woman, Aglaida, and had impure and unlawful relations with her. They were both pagans. Once, Aglaida desired to have the relics of a martyr in her house as an amulet to protect against evil, so she sent her servant to Asia to find and purchase what she desired. Boniface took several slaves with him and a large amount of money. Before parting with Aglaida, he said to her: "If I cannot find a martyr, but instead they bring you back my body martyred for Christ, will you receive it with honor, my lady?" Aglaida laughed and called him a drunkard and a sinner, and then they parted. Coming to the city of Tarsus, Boniface saw many Christians undergoing torture: some with their legs cut off, others with their hands severed, others with their eyes plucked out, still others on the gallows, and so forth. Boniface's heart was changed, and he repented of his sinful life and wept. He cried out among the Christian martyrs: "I too am a Christian!" The judge took him for interrogation and ordered that he be harshly flogged, then that boiling lead be poured into his mouth, and since this did him no harm—that he be beheaded. The slaves then took his body and carried it to Rome. An angel of God appeared to Aglaida and said: "Receive the one who was once your slave but now is our brother and fellow servant; he is the guardian of your soul and the protector of your life." The awestruck Aglaida came out to meet them, received the body of Boniface, built a church for him, and placed the relics of the martyr in it. She then repented, gave away her goods to the poor, withdrew from the world, and lived for fifteen more years in bitter repentance. St. Boniface suffered in the year 290.

2. SAINT GREGORY (GRIGENTIUS), BISHOP OF OMIR

At first, Gregory was a deacon in a church in Mediolanum [Milan] and had many visions. By God's providence he was taken to Alexandria. There Patriarch Proterius, according to a heavenly revelation, consecrated him bishop of the land of Omir in southern Arabia, which St. Elesbaan the King (October 24) had just freed from the tyranny of Dunaan the Jew. He was a good shepherd and great miracle-worker. He organized the Church in Omir with the help of the Christ-loving King Abramius, built many churches, and baptized many Jews. By his prayers he performed great and awesome miracles, even bringing about a revelation of Christ the Lord before the unbelieving Jews, which led to their baptism. He governed the Church for thirty years and entered peacefully into life eternal in the year 552.

3. SAINT BONIFACE THE MERCIFUL, BISHOP OF FERENTINO

From his childhood, Boniface was unusually kind, so much so that his mother scolded him for this. However, aided by prayer, Boniface received a hundredfold from the Lord. He died peacefully in Italy in the sixth century.

4. THE VENERABLE ELIAS OF MUROM

Elias was a monk of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves. He died in the year 1188, and his incorrupt relics are miracle-working. Even until now, three fingers on his right hand remain placed together for prayer, showing that he died at prayer. This is a reproach to those who do not make the sign of the Cross with three fingers.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR BONIFACE

A sinful soul was in Boniface,
A sinful soul oppressed by sin.
He repented and, through Christ, began to shine,
And a hundred times he sighed.
He beheld the suffering of the holy martyrs;
He beheld the sufferings, and melted like wax.
He wept, and by his tears he was sanctified,
Repenting for all his sins.
What is life? It is intended for sacrifice:
Either to the devil or to the Creator.
The first sacrifice stinks like a dead corpse,
The second ascends to the Savior.
Repentance means restoration to life,
And it was restoration for Boniface.
For the salvation of his soul, he sacrificed his body;
He purchased the Kingdom with a sack of bones.
The distance from a sinner to a penitent,
And from a penitent to a martyr,
Is no further than one finger is from another,
Is no further than the earth is from the Cross.

REFLECTION

Can faith move mountains? (**Matthew 17:20**). Without a doubt it can, and it can do even more than that: by faith, God Himself can be moved to mercy toward us sinners. In the Omirian town of Safar, the majority of the inhabitants were Jews. St. Gregory endeavored to convert them to Christianity. Then the Jews suggested to St. Gregory and to King Abramis that they should have a debate about faith with the assurance that if they [the Jews] were defeated then all of them would enter the Christian Faith. This debate lasted several days in the presence of several thousand people, both Jews and Christians. The Jews, seeing that they would be defeated by Gregory's irrefutable reasons and proofs, sought from Gregory that, in some way, he show them Christ alive so that they might see Him with their own eyes and then they would believe. Having great boldness before the Lord because of the purity of his heart, St. Gregory knelt facing east and, before everyone, began to pray to God. When he had finished his prayer, the earth quaked, thunder clapped, and the heavens opened in the east. A cloud, glowing with a flaming fire and shining rays, moved from the east and then slowly descended to the earth toward that place where the assembly of people had gathered. In the midst of the cloud there stood a man of inexpressible beauty, with a face of extraordinary brightness and in a vesture that appeared to be woven of lightning. He moved upon the cloud until He came over Bishop Gregory himself. Everyone saw Him in unsurpassable glory and beauty, and in fear fell to the ground on their faces. Gregory cried out: "One is Holy, One is the Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen." At this, there came a voice to the Jews from the Lord's glory: "For the sake of the bishop's prayers, He Who was crucified by your fathers heals you." And the shining cloud moved away as slowly as it came. After that, the Jews were baptized.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the humility of Moses before God:

1. How Moses always emphasized God and never himself;
2. How he looked for all strength, for all good, and for all help from God only, and not from anyone else;
3. How, in all labor, he humbly turned to God for help and leadership.

HOMILY

-on Samuel-

For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord (I Samuel 1:27-28).

Besought of God and dedicated to God, Samuel was a prophet and leader of the people of Israel. The blessed Hannah, his childless mother, besought him from God with tears and sacrifices. And she gave him, her one and only greatest blessing, to the service of the Lord from his infancy. A wise mother does not consider her children as her own, but rather as God's. They are God's both when God gives them and when He takes them, but they are mostly God's when a mother herself dedicates them to Him. God's gift is returned to Him as a reciprocal gift, for we have nothing of our own to give to Him but only that which we receive from Him. The young Samuel lived in the Temple among the iniquitous sons of Eli the high priest, and he did not become corrupt. The Lord would not reveal Himself to the sinful elders, but He appeared to this pure child: for Samuel did the will of God, **and did let none of his words fall to the ground (I Samuel 3:19)**. Samuel was a judge of the people of Israel from his youth to old age and committed nothing wrong either before God or before the people. God gave him the power to prophesy and work miracles. He defeated all of God's enemies and the enemies of the people, and he anointed two kings, Saul and David. When he grew old, he called the people together and asked them if he had ever committed any violence against anyone or accepted a bribe from anyone. And the people replied with one voice: **Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand (I Samuel 12:4)**. Behold, such a man was he, who was given by God and given to God as a reciprocal gift, and who grew up with the blessing of God and the blessing of his mother. Let mothers benefit from the example of the blessed Hannah; let judges and rulers of the people benefit from the example of the righteous Samuel.

O Holy and Most-holy Lord, gracious and most gracious, open our souls to see Thy holiness and Thy goodness, that we may repent of our evils.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HIEROMARTYR IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER

This holy man is called "the God-bearer" because he constantly bore the name of the Living God in his heart and on his lips. According to tradition, he was thus named because he was held in the arms of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ. On a day when the Lord was teaching His disciples humility, He took a child and placed him among them, saying: **Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:4).** This child was Ignatius. Later, Ignatius was a disciple of St. John the Theologian, together with Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. As Bishop of Antioch, Ignatius governed the Church of God as a good shepherd and was the first to introduce antiphonal chanting in the Church, in which two choirs alternate the chanting. This manner of chanting was revealed to St. Ignatius by the angels in heaven. When Emperor Trajan was passing through Antioch on his way to do battle with the Persians, he heard of Ignatius, summoned him and counseled him to offer sacrifice to the idols. If Ignatius would do so, Trajan would bestow upon him the rank of senator. As the counsels and threats of the emperor were in vain, St. Ignatius was shackled in irons and sent to Rome in the company of ten merciless soldiers, to be thrown to the wild beasts. Ignatius rejoiced in suffering for his Lord, only praying to God that the wild beasts would become the tomb for his body and that no one would prevent him from this death. After a long and difficult journey from Asia through Thrace, Macedonia and Epirus, Ignatius arrived in Rome, where he was thrown to the lions in the circus. The lions tore him to pieces and devoured him, leaving only several of the larger bones and his heart. This glorious lover of the Lord Christ suffered in the year 106 in Rome at the time of the Christ-hating Emperor Trajan. Ignatius has appeared many times from the other world and worked miracles, even to this day helping all who call upon him for help.

2. SAINT DANILO, ARCHBISHOP OF SERBIA

Danilo was the son of wealthy and God-loving parents. In his youth he was given a good upbringing. King Milutin took him to his court, but out of great love for God he fled and was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of Konchulsk near the Ibar. Later, he was the abbot of the Monastery of Hilandar [Mount Athos] and suffered much from the plundering Latin Crusaders. He was the Bishop of Banja, then of Hum, and finally the Archbishop of Serbia. From beginning to end, he was a strict ascetic and had the special gift of tears. He made peace between Kings Dragutin and Milutin, and later between Milutin and Stefan of Dechani. He fought fervently against the Latins as well as the Bogomils. Under his supervision, the Monasteries of Banja and Dechani were built, and he restored and built many other churches. He wrote the genealogy of the Serbian kings and saints. Untiring in his service to God to the end of his life, he entered peacefully into rest on the night between the nineteenth and twentieth of December, 1338, during the reign of Tsar Dushan. Danilo was a great hierarch, a great ascetic, a great laborer and a great patriot.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HIEROMARTYR IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER

O Hierarch of Christ, wonderful and exemplary,
O gracious Hierarch, not an adversary of God,
Not from among the opponents of God, who killed Christ,
But from among the God-bearers, who loved Christ-
Holy Ignatius, God-bearing man,
You do we glorify; of you we are proud.
Emperor Trajan offered you titles and honors,
If only you would bow down before the idols.
You amazed the emperor, for you did not consent
To betray the Lord, not for the entire kingdom.
Instead, you went joyfully to death, O God-bearing Father;
For that we glorify you; of you we are proud.
Thrown before wild beasts, quietly you wait.
Rome seeks amusement; they toy with you!
"I am God's wheat!" you exclaimed there.
"The beasts shall grind me, to become good bread!"
And now, where is Trajan? But you are an inhabitant of heaven.
You are a hymn to the angels, and to us a teacher.
Holy Ignatius, you who bore God,
Entreat God to grant us the Bread of Life!

REFLECTION

The holy martyrs, seized with the love of Christ, were like unquenchable flames. This love eased their sufferings and made their deaths sweet. St. Chrysostom says of St. Ignatius: "He put off his body with as much ease as one takes off his clothes." Traveling to Rome to his death, Ignatius feared only one thing: that Christians would somehow prevent his martyrdom for Christ, by their prayers to God or in some outward manner. Therefore he continually implored them, in writing and in speech, not to do this. "Forgive me," he said. "I know what is for my benefit. I but begin to be a disciple of Christ when I desire nothing, either visible or invisible, save to attain Christ. May every diabolical torture come upon me: fire, crucifixion, wild beasts, the sword, tearing asunder, the crushing of my bones, and the dismemberment of my whole body-only that I may receive Jesus Christ. It is better for me to die for Christ than to reign to the ends of the earth.... My love is nailed to the Cross, and there is no fire of love in me for any earthly thing." When he was brought to the circus, he turned to the people with these words: "Citizens of Rome, know that I am not being punished for any crime, neither have I been condemned to death for any transgression, but rather for the sake of my God, by Whose love I am overcome and Whom I insatiably desire. I am His wheat, and the teeth of the wild beasts will grind me to be His pure bread." When he had been devoured by the wild beasts, by God's providence his heart remained among the bones. When the unbelievers cut open the saint's heart, they saw inside, inscribed in golden letters, the name Jesus Christ.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the courage of Joshua the son of Nun:

1. How Joshua held unswervingly to all the Lord's commandments;
2. How, with faith in God's help, he courageously entered into every battle against the enemies of his people;
3. How he was victorious everywhere and ascribed all his victories to God.

HOMILY

-on David-

And David said to Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord (II Samuel 12:13).

My tears have been my food day and night (Psalm 42:3).

King David sinned against God and repented, and God forgave him. The king's sin was great, but greater still was his repentance. He was guilty before God of two grave sins: adultery and murder. But when Nathan the prophet of God denounced him, he cried out in anguish: **I have sinned against the Lord!** Thus he confessed his sin and repented bitterly, most bitterly. Grief-stricken, he prayed to God, weeping, fasting, lying on the ground, and enduring meekly the terrible blows that God sent upon him, his house and his people because of his sins. In his penitential Psalms he says: **I am a worm and not a man (Psalm 22:6); Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my flesh (Psalm 102:5); I lie awake ... for I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping (Psalm 102:7, 9); My knees are grown weak through fasting (Psalm 109:24).** Here is true repentance; here is a true penitent! He did not become hardened in sin nor did he fall into despair, but, hoping in the mercy of God, he repented unceasingly. And God, Who loves the penitent, showed mercy upon this model of penitence. God forgave him and glorified him above all the kings of Israel; He gave him the great grace to compose the most beautiful penitential prayers and to prophesy the coming into the world of the Holy Savior, Who would be of his seed. Brethren, do you see how wonderful is God's mercy toward penitents? So much mercy did God have on this repentant David that He was not ashamed to take upon Himself flesh from David's seed. Blessed are they who do not become hardened in sin and who do not fall into despair because of sin. Repentance saves both the one and the other from evil.

O Merciful Lord, soften our hearts with tears of repentance.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 21 -

1. THE HOLY MARTYR JULIANA AND 630 MARTYRS WITH HER

This glorious virgin and martyr was born in Nicomedia of pagan parents. Hearing the Gospel preached, she turned to Christ with all her heart and began to live in exact observance of the Lord's commandments. Eleusius, a senator, was her betrothed. In order to turn him away, Juliana told him that she would marry him only if he became the eparch of that city. She suggested this to him, thinking that this young man would never attain such a high position. Nevertheless, Eleusius tried and, by flattery and bribery, attained the post of Eparch of Nicomedia. Juliana then revealed to him that she was a Christian and could not enter into marriage with him until he embraced her Faith, saying: "What does it benefit us to be united physically but divided spiritually?" Embittered by this, Eleusius denounced her to her father. The enraged father scorned her, beat her, and then handed her over to the eparch for torture. The eparch ordered that they severely beat her, then she was cast into prison, all wounded and bloody. However, the Lord healed her in prison, and she appeared before the eparch completely well. He then threw her into a glowing furnace but the fire did not burn her. Seeing this miracle, many believed in Christ God. Five hundred men and one hundred and thirty women were converted. The eparch condemned them all to death and ordered them all to be beheaded. Thus their souls entered Paradise. Then the wicked judge condemned holy Juliana to be beheaded. With a joyful spirit, Juliana went out to the place of execution, prayed to God on her knees, and placed her head on the block. Her head was severed and her soul went to the Kingdom of Christ's eternal light in the year 304. God's punishment quickly befell Eleusius: as he was sailing on the sea, his ship broke up and he fell into the water. He did not find death in the water, but swam to an island, where dogs tore him to pieces and devoured him.

2. SAINT PETER THE WONDERWORKER, METROPOLITAN OF RUSSIA

Peter was born in the province of Volhynia and embraced the monastic life at the age of twelve. He was a wonderful ascetic and iconographer. He founded a monastery on the river Rata and became its abbot. Against his will, he was appointed Metropolitan of Kiev and consecrated in Constantinople by Patriarch Athanasius. As metropolitan, he endured much at the hands of the envious and the heretics. He governed the Church for eighteen years as a good and zealous shepherd. During his lifetime he built a crypt for himself in the Church of the Dormition, where his holy and miracle-working relics repose even today. He entered into rest in the year 1326 and went to his true homeland.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR THEMISTOCLES

As a shepherd, the young Themistocles tended sheep in a field near the city of Myra in Lycia. At that time the persecutors of Christians were pursuing St. Dioscorides, and they came upon Themistocles in the field. They asked him if he saw the one being pursued and if he knew where he was hiding. Themistocles, although he knew, refused to say, but instead declared himself a Christian. He was tortured and beheaded at the time of Decius in the year 251.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE MOTHER OF SAINT PETER, METROPOLITAN OF RUSSIA

The glorious mother of Peter the Saint,
When she was pregnant with Peter,
Dreamed a dream, and saw in that dream
That, in her hands, she held a lamb:
With slender horns, a lamb all white.
Between the lamb's horns was a most beautiful tree,
And on the tree were fragrant flowers,
And fragrant fruits around the flowers.
The tree's branches were adorned with candles,
Glowing candles like shining stars,
Redolent with a heavenly scent.
The dream of the mother was wonderfully realized:
The meek lamb prefigured Peter,
The horns-Peter's bravery,
The beautiful tree-the soul of the saint,
The multicolored flowers-his multitude of virtues,
The fruits-his works of mercy,
The glowing candles-his faith and prayer.
That which was revealed in an image to the mother
Was shown in truth in Peter.

REFLECTION

Whoever climbs to the Kingdom of Christ must encounter obstacles, and these obstacles are numerous and varied. Especially dangerous are the evils of the demons. Therefore, every man zealous for the spiritual life must be especially cautious and not accept every shining vision from the other world as a divine revelation. That even the devil is able to appear as an angel of light is shown in the life of the Holy Martyr Juliana. When this holy virgin lay in prison, the devil appeared to her in angelic light, and he counseled her to offer sacrifice to the idols so as to end her tortures. The frightened Juliana asked: "Who are you?" The devil replied: "I am an angel of God! God is greatly concerned about you. Therefore, He sent me with the message that you should submit to the eparch, so that your body will not be destroyed by pain; the Lord is gracious and will forgive you because of the weakness of your wounded body." The martyr was horrified at these words. Confused, she fell down in tears in prayer to God, asking Him to reveal who had spoken with her. Then a voice from heaven came to her: "Be brave, Juliana, I am with you; I give you authority and power over him who came to you, and from him alone will you discover who he is." And the devil was bound and forced to acknowledge that he was the same one who had deceived Eve in Paradise, who had told Cain to murder Abel, Herod to slaughter the children of Bethlehem, the Jews to stone Stephen, Nero to crucify Peter upside down and to behead Paul, and so forth. Thus, this holy virgin, girded with the power of God, did not allow herself to be deluded by the evil spirit, but she defeated him by her vigilant and ardent prayers to God.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate David's repentance:

1. How King David did not sin while he was a shepherd and a simple subject;
2. How, as king, he sinned against God;
3. How he immediately recognized his sin, confessed it and repented bitterly.

HOMILY

-on Elias the Prophet-

As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word (I Kings 17:1).

These words are terrible sounding to every mortal ear, for a man spoke them, a man **subject to like passions as we are (James 5:17)**. You ask yourselves, brethren, how can a mortal man shut up the heavens and stop the rain? But ask yourselves: how can a mortal man open the heavens and bring down rain upon the parched ground? We know that even now God opens the heavens and gives rain at the prayers of men: **And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matthew 21:22)**, says our Savior. As Moses, by living faith and prayer, worked awesome miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness, as Joshua the son of Nun held back the course of the sun, so also God's prophet Elias shut and opened the heavens, brought down fire from heaven, and worked other mighty and awesome miracles all through faith and prayer. God gave Elias the power to work such miracles, for Elias was zealous for the glory of God and not for his own glory: **I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts (I Kings 19:14)**. This man of God sought nothing for himself but sought everything for God. God was everything to him: all glory, all strength, all good. Therefore, God crowned him with immortal glory, awesome might, and treasure which does not decay and which moths do not corrupt. God did not permit Elias to die but took him to heaven as he did Enoch. St. Elias had a soul as pure as the morning dew, a body as chaste as a child's, and a heart and mind as blameless as that of an angel of God. Therefore, he was and remains a vessel of God's power. He worked wonders then and works them today.

O Living Lord, the God of Thy Prophet Elias, Who hast adopted us through baptism by Thy holy grace: enkindle also in us the faith and zeal of Thy holy prophet.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR ANASTASIA THE DELIVERER FROM BONDS, AND OTHERS WITH HER

This glorious heroine of the Christian Faith was born in Rome into a wealthy senatorial family of a pagan father and a Christian mother. From her early youth, she clung in love to the Lord Jesus, guided in the teaching of Christ by a devout teacher, Chrysogonus. Anastasia was forced by her father to enter into marriage with a pagan landowner, Publius. Excusing herself on the basis of a female illness, she in no way wished to enter into physical relations with him. For this, her husband tortured her harshly by confinement and starvation. He inflicted even more tortures upon her when he learned of her secret visits to the prisons of the Christian martyrs: bringing them provisions, ministering to them, bathing their wounds and loosening their bonds. But by God's providence she was freed from her wicked husband. Publius was sent to Persia by the emperor, and while sailing on the sea he was drowned. St. Anastasia then began to minister freely to the tortured Christian martyrs and to comfort the poor, giving them alms from her great inheritance. At one time the Emperor Diocletian was in the town of Aquileia and ordered that Chrysogonus, the confessor of Christ, be brought to him. St. Anastasia accompanied him on the way. Holy Chrysogonus was beheaded by order of the emperor, and then three sisters-Agape, Chionia and Irene-also suffered (April 16): the first two were cast into fire and the third was shot through with arrows. St. Anastasia took their bodies, wrapped them in white linen, anointed them with many aromatic spices, and honorably buried them. Following this, Anastasia went to Macedonia, where she helped the sufferers for Christ. There she became well known as a Christian, for which she was seized and brought before various judges for interrogation and torture. Desiring to die for her beloved Christ, Anastasia constantly longed for Him in her heart. A certain chief of the pagan priests, Ulpianus, lustfully tried to touch St. Anastasia's body, but he was suddenly blinded and breathed his last. Condemned to death by starvation, St. Anastasia lingered in prison for thirty days without food, nourishing herself only on tears and prayer. Then she was placed in a boat with several other Christians to be drowned, but God delivered her even from this death. She was finally tied by the feet and hands to four wheels over a fire, and she gave up her holy soul to God. She suffered and took up her habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in the year 304.

2. THE HOLY MARTYR THEODOTA WITH HER THREE CHILDREN

Being left a young widow with three children, Theodota gave herself completely to the service of God and the rearing of her children in devout faith. St. Anastasia lived with her when she was in Macedonia, and together they visited the Christian prisoners in the jails. Brought to trial, Theodota boldly confessed Christ the Lord. Then she was sent to Nicetas, the proconsul of Bithynia. When a shameless pagan tried to touch her body, he immediately saw an angel of God beside her and was struck by the angel. Condemned to death and cast into a fiery furnace together with her three children, St. Theodota honorably ended her earthly life and entered into the Kingdom of Eternal Glory.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR ANASTASIA, THE DELIVERER FROM BONDS

**The holy maiden Anastasia serves God;
She shines before God by faith, hope and deeds.
The maiden leaves husband, honor and riches,
And gladly serves the captives, glorifying God.
She looses the bonds, and washes the wounds of the martyrs;
She looses their bonds, giving gifts and not fetters.
She seeks payment neither from men nor from the earth.
Christ God eases her soul and heart.
Her pains have passed, and Anastasia remains in glory;
She now rejoices with the angels in heaven.**

REFLECTION

The merciful God often sends comfort to those pleasing to Him on earth from the other world through his saints. St. Theodota suffered for Christ before St. Anastasia. Anastasia was then cast into a confined and dark prison to die of hunger, according to the judgment of the torturers. During the thirty days of her imprisonment, St. Theodota appeared to Anastasia every night from the other world and strengthened her in her suffering. Anastasia spoke of many things with St. Theodota and asked numerous questions. One night she asked her how she was able to come to her after her death. Theodota replied that the souls of the martyrs are given special grace from God, so that after departing this world they may return to speak to whomever they desire for the imparting of instruction and comfort. When thirty days had passed, the torturer brought St. Anastasia out of prison and was amazed to see her still alive. He then condemned her, along with several others, to be drowned in the sea. The Christians were put into a small boat by the soldiers, who set sail in another. When the Christians were brought out into the deep, the soldiers upset the boat, so that the water would enter and drown the condemned. Then a miraculous vision took place: St. Theodota appeared on the water and guided the boat to shore. Thus, all who were condemned to death were saved with Anastasia. Seeing this miracle of God, one hundred and twenty pagans immediately believed in Christ and were baptized.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate David's sufferings because of sin:

1. How misfortune arose in David's house: one of his sons rose up against the other, and a brother against his sister;
2. How Absalom initiated a war against his father David;
3. How misfortune befell the entire people because of the king's sin.

HOMILY

-on long-suffering Job-

The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away (Job 1:21).

Brethren, let the righteous one fear nothing; all shall be well with him. The whole of Sacred Scripture shows us that God will never forsake the righteous. The example of Job shows us this as clearly as the sun. Job had seven sons and three daughters; he had riches, respect among the people, and friends. And he lost all of this in one day. He did not grumble against **God but fell down upon the ground and worshiped and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither (Job 1:20-21)**. Then Job lost his health, the last of what he had, and his entire body, from the top of his head to the heels of his feet, was covered with sores and pus. And Job sat in ashes and lifted up praise to God. His wife tried to persuade him to renounce his God, but righteous Job said to her: **Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? (Job 2:10)**. His friends reproached him, saying that he was sinful and proud in his understanding and righteousness before them, but Job humbly prayed to God and patiently endured all his wounds and misfortunes.

It happens today, as it did then, that when some misfortune befalls us, our neighbors consider themselves to be more intelligent and more righteous than we are. But the most wise God permitted all these misfortunes to fall on Job in order to test not only Job His servant but also his kinsmen and his friends. When each of them had shown what kind of person he was, when each of them had been tested before God, then God, with His almighty right hand, restored Job to health, returned twice as much wealth as He had taken away, and gave him again seven sons and three daughters.

He who has strong faith, brethren, has clear spiritual sight, so that he can see the finger of God in his prosperity as well as in his suffering. He who has strong faith also has great patience in suffering. When God gives to him, he gives thanks, and when God takes away, he blesses: **Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21)**.

O Lord, the God of the long-suffering and patient Job, teach us to bless Thy name in our sufferings.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE TEN HOLY MARTYRS OF CRETE

They suffered for Christ the Lord during the persecution of Decius in the year 250. Their names were Theodulus, Saturnicus, Euporus, Gelasius, Eunician, Zoticus, Pompeius, Agathopous, Basilides and Evaristus. They were all eminent and honored citizens, the best among the best. When they were brought to the place of execution they were elated, and they discussed among themselves which of them would be the first to be beheaded, for each one of them wanted to be the first to go to his beloved Christ. Then they prayed: "O Lord, forgive Thy servants and accept our blood, which is about to be shed, as an offering on our behalf and for our kinsmen and friends and for all of our fatherland, that all may be freed from the darkness of ignorance and may know Thee, the True Light, O Eternal King!" They were beheaded and entered into the Kingdom of Glory to rejoice eternally.

2. SAINT NIPHON THE WONDERWORKER

Niphon was born in Paphlagonia and brought up in Constantinople at the court of a commander [Sabbatius]. Falling into evil company, the young Niphon became dissolute and gave himself over to many sins and vices. Because of his sin, he could not even pray to God. By the mercy of the Most-holy Theotokos, he was brought back to the path of righteousness and was tonsured a monk. He had numerous visions of the heavenly world, and for four years he endured a difficult struggle with a demon, who constantly whispered to him: "There is no God! There is no God!" But, when the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to him alive on an icon, Niphon received great power over evil spirits and was freed from these grievous temptations. He was such a great seer that he saw angels and demons around men just as clearly as he saw men themselves, and he knew the thoughts of men. He often spoke with angels and disputed with demons. He built a church to the Most-holy Theotokos in Constantinople, gathered monks together, and saved many souls. Alexander, the Archbishop of Alexandria, according to a revelation from heaven, consecrated him bishop of the town of Constantia on Cyprus. At that time St. Niphon was already old. He governed well the Church of God for a short time and took up his habitation in Christ's Eternal Kingdom. Before his death he was visited by St. Athanasius the Great, then the archdeacon of the Church in Alexandria, and after his death he was seen by Athanasius, his face shining as the sun.

3. THE VENERABLE NAHUM, WONDERWORKER OF OHRID

Nahum was a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius and one of the Five Companions who most zealously labored with these Apostles to the Slavs. St. Nahum traveled to Rome, where he became well known for his miracle-working power as well as his great learning. He was knowledgeable in many languages. After his return from Rome, he and his companions settled on the shores of Lake Ohrid with the help of King Boris Michael. While St. Clement labored as bishop in Ohrid, St. Nahum founded a monastery on the southern shore of the lake. The monastery even today adorns that shore, just as the name of St. Nahum adorns the history of Slavic Christianity and has been a source of miraculous power and a refuge for the sick and the unfortunate through the ages. Many monks from throughout the Balkans gathered around St. Nahum. St. Nahum was a wise teacher, a unique leader of monks, a resolute ascetic, a miracle-working intercessor, and a spiritual father. A tireless worker, St. Nahum labored especially on the translation of the Sacred Scriptures and other ecclesiastical books from the Greek language into the Slavonic. He worked miracles both during his life and after his death. His miracle-working relics, to this day, amaze many with numerous miracles, healing grave illnesses, especially insanity. Nahum entered into rest in the first half of the tenth century and took up his habitation in the joy of his beloved Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE NAHUM, WONDERWORKER OF OHRID

Venerable Nahum, Apostle to the Slavs,
Was completely illumined with the Light of Christ.
Unshakable in spirit, like a firm rock,
By grace he subjugated the flesh to the spirit.
Fasting and prayers and all-night vigils
Cleansed his soul of evil passions,
And he became like unto the mighty angels.
God granted him heavenly powers.
The Lord subjected to him all the powers of nature,
And also the evil demons and the darkened passions.
He won over people and nations to Christ,
Healing infirmities by words and miracles.
He died, but died not; he is a citizen of the heavens.
St. Nahum even now gazes upon this world;
In body and spirit, he performs miracles,
And even now preaches Christ to all peoples.
O Holy Nahum, the pride of the Balkans,
God-pleaser and friend of the angels:
Great is your power, given by God.
O help us all to serve the Lord.

REFLECTION

While still living in the flesh, the saints had great revelations from God and visions of both heavenly and infernal powers. All of their revelations and visions confirm the Orthodox Faith in all of her teachings. The saints are a joy, a great joy to the faithful. St. Niphon saw the Theotokos and the Lord Christ alive in glory; he saw men's souls leaving the body; and he saw the guardian angels of certain men! He spoke openly with angels and disputed with demons. The Church teaches that the sincere repentance of a sinner, even in the last hour, saves the soul of the penitent. St. Niphon saw the soul of one such repentant sinner in the last moment; he saw how the angels defended that soul from the aggressive demons and carried it to Paradise. The Church teaches that suicide is a mortal sin. St. Niphon saw the soul of a suicide as the devils were dragging it to hell. The guardian angel of that soul went off and wept bitterly for that soul. This was the soul of a servant who had committed suicide because his master was merciless, and who did not want to endure to the end in order to be saved.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate God's reward to the penitent David:

1. How God glorified the penitent David and gave him the gift of His Holy Spirit to compile the wondrous Psalter;
2. How God made the penitent David the ancestor of many good kings and righteous seers;
3. How God made him the ancestor, according to the flesh, of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

HOMILY

-on Daniel the Prophet-

... And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:35).

Suffering, brethren, can weaken a man's character; however, luxury can weaken it even more. Daniel, the man of God, could not be weakened either by suffering or by luxury. In both instances he remained the same, and in both instances he was equally the messenger of the one Living God and a clairvoyant revealer of God's mysteries. He lived in royal luxury and then in a lions' den. In both instances, he remained unchanged: in royal luxury he fasted, and in the lions' den he did not hunger. The Most-high God rewarded his faithful servant with the great gift of prophecy. The main subject of his prophecies is Christ the Lord. Christ will come and will destroy idol worship throughout the whole earth. He will fill the earth with Himself like no man clothed in the flesh has ever done. He is the One to Whom will be given **dominion and glory and a Kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve Him (Daniel 7:14)**. Daniel, the great prophet of God, prophesied the time, the exact time, of the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world.

How we Christians must be ashamed before this Daniel! We see all the promises fulfilled in Christ, and yet we are lax in our faith and in our love for Christ. All was not revealed to Daniel as it is revealed to us who are baptized; nevertheless, he did not turn away from God, not once.

O Lord God of Daniel, strengthen us, give us repentance, and have mercy on us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE MARTYR EUGENIA AND OTHERS WITH HER

Eugenia was the daughter of Philip the Eparch of all Egypt and was born in Rome. At that time the Christians had been driven out of Alexandria and lived outside the city. The virgin Eugenia visited the Christians and accepted their Faith with her whole heart. Fleeing from her parents with two of her faithful eunuchs, she was baptized by Bishop Elias. Disguised in men's clothing, she entered a men's monastery where she received the monastic habit. So much did she cleanse her heart by voluntary asceticism that she received from God the grace of healing the sick. Thus, she healed a wealthy woman, Melanthia. After this, however, Melanthia wanted to lure Eugenia into bodily sin, not suspecting that Eugenia was a woman. Since she was adamantly rejected by Eugenia, out of revenge this evil woman went to the eparch and slandered Eugenia in the same manner as Potiphar's wife had once slandered the chaste Joseph. The eparch ordered that all the monks be bound and cast into prison together with Eugenia. But when St. Eugenia was brought before the tribunal, she revealed herself to her father as his daughter. The overjoyed Philip was then baptized with his entire household, and he was chosen as Bishop of Alexandria. Hearing of this, the Roman emperor sent a wicked commander, Terentius, who came to Alexandria and secretly had Philip killed. St. Eugenia moved to Rome with her mother and brothers. In Rome she fearlessly and zealously converted pagans, especially maidens, to the true Faith, and thus she converted a beautiful maiden Basilla to the Faith. Shortly afterward, Basilla was beheaded for Christ as Eugenia had foretold to her. Then both eunuchs, Protus and Hyacinth, were beheaded. Finally, a martyr's end came to St. Eugenia, whose presence had caused the collapse and destruction of the Temple of Diana. The torturers threw her first into water and then into fire, but God saved her. The Lord Jesus Himself appeared to her in prison and told her that she would suffer on the day of His Nativity. And so it was. She was beheaded by the sword on December 25, 262, in Rome. After her death, St. Eugenia appeared in great glory to her mother and comforted her.

2. THE VENERABLE NICHOLAS THE COMMANDER

Some think this great saint was a Slav of Balkan ancestry. At the time of Emperor Nicephorus, Nicholas was a commander and had authority over a division of the army that went to war against the Bulgarians. Along the way, Nicholas spent the night in an inn, where he experienced a great temptation and had a strange dream. This dream fully came to pass in the war, where the Greeks were utterly defeated by the Bulgarians in the year 811. Nicholas was spared, and out of gratitude for God's providence he left his military rank and became a monk. He lived a long life of asceticism and became so perfect that he became a great clairvoyant and God-pleaser. He died peacefully in the ninth century and took up his habitation in the Blessed Kingdom of Christ the Lord.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE MARTYR EUGENIA

**Eugenia, a glorious maiden, recognized God
And dedicated herself completely to His service.
She sacrificed this temporary life for the eternal and endless one;
To Christ the Eternal she betrothed her heart.
With patience she conquered the vice of evil
And gained the wondrous grace of God.
With the angels in heaven she now rejoices;
With the saints she gloriously celebrates the eternal feast.
Eugenia, beautiful virgin, God sanctified you.
Remember us sinners before God even now.**

REFLECTION

Victory over temptation is victory over death. This is shown by a wondrous experience of St. Nicholas the Commander. When this commander went off with King Nicephorus's army against the Bulgarians, it happened that he spent the night in a wayside inn. The innkeeper had a daughter, a young girl, who, attracted by the imperial commander's outward beauty, began to entice him into sin. Nicholas refused her once, saying to her that this was enticing him into a satanic act. Nevertheless, the shameless girl came a second and a third time to the commander's room and again tempted him to an impure act. The commander refused both the second and third propositions even more decisively, counseling her to preserve her virginity and not to give her body and soul over to the devil. Finally, he said to her that he was a soldier and was going to war, and that it was unworthy and dangerous for a soldier to soil himself with such a misdeed, which would anger God and lead him to certain death. Thus, this God-loving man conquered temptation. The following day, he moved farther on with the army. The next night, he saw the following vision: He was standing in a spacious field and saw near him a powerful man sitting with his right leg crossed over his left. Before them stood two armies in the field, one facing the other, the Greeks and the Bulgarians. This powerful man told him to watch carefully what was about to happen. Nicholas looked and saw the following: As long as the powerful man kept his right leg crossed over the left, the Greek army overcame the Bulgarian army, and when he changed his position and placed his left leg over the right leg, the Bulgarians charged and ferociously cut down the Greeks. Then this powerful man brought the commander closer to the slaughtered Greek army. The entire field was covered with corpses, body beside body. Only in the middle of these corpses was there an empty space, large enough for the body of a man. Then the man said to Nicholas: "This place was appointed for your body, but since you defeated the devil's temptations three times last night, you saved your body and soul from death." That which Nicholas saw in his dream, he saw precisely in reality at the time of the battle. The entire Greek army perished on the battlefield, but Nicholas returned home alive, not to the barracks anymore, but to a monastery.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the assembly of the forefathers, prophets and righteous ones in the heavens:

1. How, before Christ, they fulfilled God's law;
2. How they foretold Christ the Lord both in word and in the image of their lives;
3. How they now rejoice in the Kingdom of Christ.

HOMILY

-on the righteous Joseph-

**Then Joseph her husband, being a just man ...
did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him
(Matthew 1:19, 24).**

One must fear God more than men, and one must obey God more than men. This is the lesson from the life of the Righteous Joseph, the kinsman and guardian of the Holy Virgin Mary. He lived at the time of the juncture between the Law and grace, and was faithful to the Law until grace appeared; then, when the new grace of God appeared, he became faithful to grace. Obedient to the letter of the Law, he wanted to put the Holy Virgin away when she conceived the Savior of the world in her most pure body. But when an angel of God announced to him that Mary had conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20), he abandoned his intention and did not put her away, but did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him. He did not reason for himself, but obeyed the will of God. Therefore, God made him worthy of great glory, both on earth and in heaven. Quietly and secretly he served God, and God glorified him openly. Not only was he made worthy of the Kingdom of God but also his sons and daughters were. What father would want anything more than that his son would be an apostle of Christ? And Joseph had two sons who were apostles. Thus, God glorifies those who fear Him and obey Him.

O great Lord, God of the righteous Joseph, help us sinners also to love Thy righteousness and to fear only Thee.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

DECEMBER - 25 -

1. THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4) to save the human race. And when nine months were fulfilled from the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel had appeared to the Most-holy Virgin in Nazareth, saying, **Rejoice, thou that art highly favored ... behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son (Luke 1:28, 31)**, at that time there went forth a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the people of the Roman Empire should be taxed. In accordance with this decree, everyone had to go to his own town and be registered. That is why the righteous Joseph came with the Most-holy Virgin to Bethlehem, the city of David, for they were both of the royal lineage of David. Since many people descended on this small town for the census, Joseph and Mary were unable to find lodging in any house, and they sought shelter in a cave which shepherds used as a sheepfold. In this cave-on the night between Saturday and Sunday, on the 25th of December-the Most-holy Virgin gave birth to the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Giving birth to Him without pain just as He was conceived without sin by the Holy Spirit and not by man, she herself wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, worshiped Him as God, and laid Him in a manger. Then the righteous Joseph drew near and worshiped Him as the Divine Fruit of the Virgin's womb. Then the shepherds came in from the fields, directed by an angel of God, and worshiped Him as the Messiah and Savior. The shepherds heard a multitude of God's angels singing: **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:14)**. At that time three wise men arrived from the east, led by a wondrous star, bearing their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. They worshiped Him as the King of kings, and offered Him their gifts (**Matthew 2**). Thus entered the world He Whose coming was foretold by the prophets, and Who was born in the same manner in which it had been prophesied: of a Most-holy Virgin, in the town of Bethlehem, of the lineage of David according to the flesh, at the time when there was no king in Jerusalem of the lineage of Judah, but rather when Herod, a foreigner, was reigning. After many types and prefigurings, messengers and heralds, prophets and righteous men, wise men and kings, finally He appeared, the Lord of the world and King of kings, to perform the work of the salvation of mankind, which could not be performed by His servants. To Him be eternal glory and praise! Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Out of burning love, Thou didst come down from heaven;
From eternal beauty, Thou didst descend into monstrous pain;
From eternal light, Thou didst descend into the thick darkness of evil.
Thou didst extend Thy holy hand to those choked in sin.
Heaven was amazed, the earth quaked.
Welcome, O Christ! O ye peoples, rejoice!
Out of burning love, by which Thou didst create the world,
As a slave Thou didst debase Thyself to loose the enslaved,
To restore the house that Adam destroyed,
To enlighten the darkened, to unloose sinners.
Love that knows not fear or humiliation-
Welcome, O Christ! The Master of Salvation!
Out of burning love, O King of all beauty,
Thou didst leave the radiance of the beautiful Cherubim,
Thou didst descend into the cave of human life,
To despairing men, with a torch and peace.
How to contain Thee?-The earth became frightened.
Welcome, O Christ! Heaven bears Thee up!
The most beautiful Virgin for a long time hoped in Thee.
The earth raises her to Thee, that through her Thou wilt descend
From the lofty throne, from the heavenly city,
To bring health, to release man from sin.
O Holy Virgin, Golden Censer-
To thee be glory and praise, O Mother full of grace!

REFLECTION

The Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was first worshiped by shepherds and wise men (astrologers) from the east-the simplest and the wisest of this world. Even today, those who most sincerely worship the Lord Jesus as God and Savior are the simplest and the wisest of this world. Perverted simplicity and half-learned wisdom were always the enemies of Christ's divinity and His Gospel. But who were these wise men from the east? This question was especially studied by St. Dimitri of Rostov. He claims that they were kings of certain smaller regions or individual towns in Persia, Arabia and Egypt. At the same time, they were erudite in the knowledge of astronomy. This wondrous star appeared to them, which announced the birth of the New King. According to St. Dimitri, this star appeared to them nine months before the birth of the Lord Jesus, i.e., at the time of His conception by the Most-holy Theotokos. They spent nine months in studying this star, in preparing for the journey and in traveling. They arrived in Bethlehem shortly after the birth of the Savior of the world. One of them was called Melchior. He was old, with long white hair and beard. He offered the Lord the gift of gold. The second was called Caspar, of ruddy face, young and beardless. He offered the Lord the gift of frankincense. The third was called Balthasar, of dark complexion and a very heavy beard. He offered the Lord the gift of myrrh. After their deaths, their bodies were taken to Constantinople, from Constantinople to Milan, and from Milan to Cologne. It can be added that these three wise men were representatives of the three main races of men that descended from Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Persian represented the Japhethites, the Arabian represented the Semites, and the Egyptian represented the Hamites. Thus it can be said that, through these three, the whole human race worshiped the Incarnate Lord and God.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the beauty of the soul of the Most-holy Theotokos:

1. How her soul was radiant and immaculate;
2. How her soul was filled with peace from faith and hope in God;
3. How her soul was filled with the sweet-smelling fragrance of prayer.

HOMILY

-on the birth of the Lord, the Son of God-

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world (John 16:28).

The only-begotten Son of God, brethren, begotten in eternity of the Father without a mother, was born in time of a mother without a father. That first begetting is an unfathomable mystery of the Holy Trinity in eternity, and the second is the unfathomable mystery of God's power and love for mankind in time. The greatest mystery in time corresponds to the greatest mystery in eternity. Without entering into this greatest mystery with the small taper of our understanding, let us be content, brethren, with the knowledge that our salvation had its origin not from man or from earth, but from the greatest heights of the divine invisible world. So great is God's mercy, and so great is the dignity of man, that the Son of God Himself came down from eternity into time, from heaven to earth, from the throne of glory to the shepherd's cave, solely to save mankind, to cleanse men from sin and to return them to Paradise. **I came forth from the Father, where I had everything, and am come into the world**, which cannot give Me anything. The Lord was born in a cave to show that the whole world is one dark cave, which He alone can illumine. The Lord was born in Bethlehem-and Bethlehem means "the House of Bread"-to show that He is the only Bread of Life worthy of true men.

O Lord Jesus, the Pre-eternal Son of the Living God and the Son of the Virgin Mary, enlighten us and nourish us with Thyself.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE SYNAXIS OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS

On the second day of the Nativity, the Christian Church gives glory and thanksgiving to the Most-holy Theotokos, who gave birth to our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. This feast is called "the Synaxis" because on this day all of the faithful gather to glorify her, the Most-holy Theotokos, and to solemnly and universally celebrate a feast in her honor. In Ohrid, it has been the tradition from ancient times that, on the eve of the second day of Nativity, Vespers has been celebrated only in the Church of the Most-holy Theotokos called the Chieftain [Chelnica]. All the clergy with the people gather together to glorify the Most-pure Mother of God.

2. THE COMMEMORATION OF THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

The wise men (astrologers) from the East, having worshiped the Lord in Bethlehem, were directed to return to their home another way by command of an angel. Herod, that wicked king, planned to slaughter all the children in Bethlehem, but God saw Herod's intention and sent His angel to Joseph. The angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to take the young Child and His Mother and flee to Egypt. Joseph did this. Taking the Divine Child and His Most-holy Mother, he traveled first to Nazareth (**Luke 2:39**), where he arranged his household matters, and then, taking his son James with them, went off to Egypt (**Matthew 2:14**). Thus the words of the prophet were fulfilled: **Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt (Isaiah 19:1)**. In old Cairo today, the cave where the holy family lived can be seen. Likewise, in the village of Matara near Cairo, the tree under which the Most-holy Theotokos rested with the Lord Jesus, as well as a miraculous spring of water under this tree, are visible. After having lived for several years in Egypt, the holy family returned to Palestine, again in response to a command of an angel of God. Thus another prophecy was fulfilled: **Out of Egypt have I called my Son (Hosea 11:1)**. Herod was dead and his wicked son Archelaus-a worthy successor of him in evil-sat on his bloodstained throne. Hearing that Archelaus was reigning in Jerusalem, Joseph returned to Galilee, to his town of Nazareth, where he settled in his own home. Herod's second son, Herod the Younger, who was somewhat less evil than his brother Archelaus, then reigned in Galilee.

3. THE VENERABLE EVARESTUS

Reading the works of St. Ephraim the Syrian, Evarestus left the diplomatic service and became a monk. He was very strict with himself: he wore chains over his body and ate dry bread only once a week. He lived for seventy-five years and took up his habitation with the Lord in about the year 825.

4. SAINT EUTHYMIUS THE CONFESSOR, BISHOP OF SARDIS

Euthymius attended the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 783 and spent about thirty years in exile for his veneration of icons. During the reign of Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast, he was flogged with bullwhips, at which time he died a martyr's death, in the year 840, and received a wreath of glory in heaven.

5. THE VENERABLE CONSTANTINE OF SYNADA

Constantine was a Jew who converted to Christianity. During his baptism he touched a Cross to his head, and a miraculous imprint of the Cross remained on his head until his death. He died in Constantinople in the seventh century. Famous for his asceticism and many miracles, he prophesied the day of his death seven years beforehand.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE SYNAXIS OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS

At the border between night and sunny day,
The dawn is rosy, pink and dewy.
The crimson dawn thou art, O Virgin given by God,
Precursor of the day, rosy and glorious.
Thou didst correct Eve and restore her to Paradise.
Do not withhold thy help from us sinners.
Israel crossed dry-shod over the Red Sea;
A cool spring flowed from the rock in the wilderness;
The bush burned but was not consumed-
As the dawn resembles the crimson eve,
So thou, O Virgin, dost resemble those foreshadowings.
O thou whom the Church calls the Mother of God,
Unknown to sin, not given to sin,
O Most-pure Mother of our Savior,
Because of thy purity thou wast chosen by God,
To bring down the Eternal Creator to earth.
That is why thou hast authority to pray for us,
And we have the joy of hymning and glorifying thee!

REFLECTION

A story of the Divine Christ-child: When the holy family fled before Herod's sword to Egypt, robbers leapt out on the road with the intention of stealing something. The righteous Joseph was leading the donkey, on which were some belongings and on which the Most-holy Theotokos was riding with her Son at her breast. The robbers seized the donkey to lead it away. At that moment, one of the robbers approached the Mother of God to see what she was holding next to her breast. The robber, seeing the Christ-child, was astonished at His unusual beauty and said in his astonishment: "If God were to take upon Himself the flesh of man, He would not be more beautiful than this Child!" This robber then ordered his companions to take nothing from these travelers. Filled with gratitude toward this generous robber, the Most-holy Virgin said to him: "Know that this Child will repay you with a good reward because you protected Him today." Thirty-three years later, this same thief hung on the Cross for his crimes, crucified on the right side of Christ's Cross. His name was Dismas, and the name of the thief on the left side was Gestas. Beholding Christ the Lord innocently crucified, Dismas repented for all the evil of his life. While Gestas reviled the Lord, Dismas defended Him, saying: **This man hath done nothing amiss. (Luke 23:41)**. Dismas, therefore, was the wise thief to whom our Lord said: **Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43)**. Thus the Lord granted Paradise to him who spared Him in childhood.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the purity of the Most-holy Mother of God:

1. On the immaculate purity of her body: passionless and disciplined by fasting;
2. On the immaculate purity of her heart, in which a sinful desire never dwelt;
3. On the immaculate purity of her mind, in which a sinful thought never dwelt.

HOMILY

-on the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos-

And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord (Luke 1:38).

Here indeed, brethren, is a true handmaid of the Lord! If a handmaid is she who exchanges her will completely for the will of her Lord, then the Most-holy Virgin is the first among all of the Lord's handmaids. If a handmaid is she who, with intent and with complete attention, beholds her Lord, then again the Most-holy Virgin is the first among the handmaids of the Lord. If a handmaid is one who meekly and quietly endures all insults and trials, awaiting only the reward of her Lord, then again and again the Most-holy Virgin is the first and most excellent of all the handmaids of the Lord. She did not care to please the world, but only God; nor did she care to justify herself before the world, but only before God. She herself is obedience; she herself is service; she herself is meekness. The Most-holy Virgin could in truth say to the angel of God: **Behold the handmaid of the Lord**. The greatest perfection, and the greatest honor that a woman can attain on earth, is to be a handmaid of the Lord. Eve lost this perfection and honor in Paradise without effort, and the Virgin Mary achieved this perfection and this honor outside Paradise with her efforts.

Through the prayers of the Most-holy Virgin Theotokos, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE HOLY PROTOMARTYR STEPHEN THE ARCHDEACON

Stephen was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul and one of those Jews who lived in the Hellenic provinces. Stephen was the first of the seven deacons whom the holy apostles ordained and appointed to the service of assisting the poor in Jerusalem. For this, he is called the archdeacon. By the power of his faith, Stephen worked great miracles among the people. The wicked Jews disputed with him, but they were always defeated by his wisdom and the power of the Spirit, Who acted through him. Then the shameful Jews, accustomed to calumnies and slander, incited the people and the elders of the people against the innocent Stephen, slandering him as though he had blasphemed against God and against Moses. False witnesses were quickly found who confirmed this. Stephen then stood before the people, and all **saw his face as it had been the face of an angel (Acts 6:15)**, that is, his face was illumined with the light of grace as was once the face of Moses when he spoke with God. Stephen opened his mouth and enumerated the many good works and miracles that God had performed in the past for the people of Israel, as well as the many crimes and opposition to God on the part of this people. He especially rebuked them for the killing of Christ the Lord, calling them **betrayers and murderers (Acts 7:52)**. And while they gnashed their teeth, Stephen beheld and saw the heavens open and the glory of God. That which he saw, he declared to the Jews: **Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God! (Acts 7:56)**. Then the malicious men took him outside the city and stoned him to death. Among his persecutors was his kinsman Saul, later the Apostle Paul. At that time, the Most-holy Theotokos, standing on a rock at a distance with St. John the Theologian, witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed to God for Stephen. This occurred one year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. Gamaliel, a prince of the Jews and a secret Christian, clandestinely took St. Stephen's body and buried it on his own estate. Thus, this first among the Christian martyrs gloriously reposed and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ God.

2. THE VENERABLE MARTYRS THEODORE AND THEOPHANES THE BRANDED

Theodore and Theophanes were blood brothers, born in Palestine and well educated in both secular and spiritual wisdom. They were monks in the community of St. Sava the Sanctified and later were ordained presbyters. They suffered harshly for their defense of icons under three emperors: Leo the Armenian, Michael Balbus and Theophilus. The demented Theophilus beat them with his own hands and ordered that they be branded with iron on their faces with derisive verses, for which they were called "the Branded." They were cast into prison in the town of Apamea in Bithynia. Theodore died there from his pains and wounds. Theophanes, freed at the time of the Emperors Theodore and Michael, was consecrated Metropolitan of Nicaea by Patriarch Methodius. St. Theodore died in the year 833. These two wonderful brothers suffered for Christ and received a wonderful reward from Him in the Immortal Kingdom of Light.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY PROTOMARTYR STEPHEN THE ARCHDEACON

Upon Stephen, illumined by the Spirit,
The Jewish murderers rushed.
Bloody Stephen knelt
And in a loud voice cried out to God:
"O Lord, Who from the Cross forgave
The greatest sin to ever shake the earth,
The greatest sin that heaven ever beheld,
Thou forgavest Thy murderers.
Now, O Most-gracious One, forgive mine also!
This crime-what is it compared to that one?
And I, what am I, compared to my Lord?"
Saying this he gave his spirit to God.
The angry elders, ugly cowards,
Dispersed after they killed him.
Then from heaven angels flew down
Around the body of the Protomartyr.
They chanted a hymn in chorus to him
And carried his paradisaal soul to Paradise.

REFLECTION

A story of the Divine Christ-child: Both great prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophesied that the Lord would come to Egypt and that His presence would shake the pagan temples and destroy the idols. Isaiah wrote: **Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence (Isaiah 19:1, cf. Jeremiah 43:12-13).** When the divine refugees came to the city of Hermopolis (Cairo), they approached a pagan temple, and all the idols in that temple suddenly fell down and were shattered. St. Palladius writes of this in his Lausiac History: "We saw the pagan temple there, in which all the carved idols fell to the ground at the coming of the Savior." In a certain place called Sirin there were 365 idols. When the Most-holy Virgin entered that temple with the Divine Child in her arms, all these idols fell down and were shattered. All the idols throughout Egypt fell in the same manner. The Holy Prophet Jeremiah, living in Egypt in old age, had prophesied to the pagan priests of Egypt that all the idols would fall and all the graven images would be destroyed at the time when a Virgin Mother with a Child, born in a manger, would come to Egypt. The pagan priests remembered well this prophecy. In accordance with it, they carved out a representation of a Virgin as she lay on a bed and, next to her in a manger, her young Child wrapped in swaddling clothes; and they venerated this representation. King Ptolemy asked the pagan priests what this representation meant, and they replied that it was a mystery, foretold by a prophet to their fathers, and that they were awaiting the fulfillment of this mystery. And, indeed, this mystery was fulfilled, and revealed not only in Egypt but also in the entire world.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wisdom of the Most-holy Virgin Mary:

1. How she spoke wisely with the angel of God (**Luke 1:28-38**);
2. How she pondered in her heart all that had happened at the birth of the Lord Jesus and all that was said of Him;
3. How, at Cana, she wisely told the servants to do whatever He told them.

HOMILY

-on the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos-

My soul doth magnify the Lord (Luke 1:46).

Brethren, we have in total only a few words spoken by the Most-holy Theotokos recorded in the Gospels. All of her words pertain to the magnification of God. She was silent before men but her soul conversed unceasingly with God. Every day and every hour, she found a new reason and incentive to magnify God. If only we were able to know and to record all her magnifications of God throughout her whole life, oh, how many books would it take! But, even by this one magnification, which she spoke before her kinswoman Elizabeth, the mother of the great Prophet and Forerunner John, every Christian can evaluate what a fragrant and God-pleasing flower was her most holy soul. This is but one wonderful canticle of the soul of the Theotokos, which has come down to us through the Gospel. However, such canticles were without number in the course of the life of the Most-blessed One. Even before she heard the Gospel from the lips of her Son, she knew how to speak with God and to glorify Him in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel. This knowledge came to her from the Holy Spirit of God, whose grace constantly poured into her like clear water into a pure vessel. Her soul magnified God with canticles throughout her whole life, and therefore God magnified her above the Cherubim and the Seraphim. Likewise, small and sinful as we are, the same Lord will magnify in His Kingdom us who magnify her, if we exert ourselves to fill this brief life with the magnification of God in our deeds, words, thoughts and prayers.

O Most-holy, Most-pure and Most-blessed Theotokos, cover us with the wings of thy prayers.

To thee and thy Son and our Lord be glory and praise forever. Amen.

1. THE TWENTY THOUSAND HOLY MARTYRS OF NICOMEDIA

During the reign of the wicked Emperor Maximian Hercules, the Christian Faith flourished in Nicomedia and increased day by day. At one time the emperor, staying in this city, learned of the large number of Christians and the progress of the Christian Church, and he became greatly embittered and conceived a plan of how to kill them all. The Feast of the Nativity of Christ approached, and the emperor, knowing that all the Christians gathered in the church for this feast, ordered that on that day the church be surrounded by soldiers and set afire. When all the Christians had gathered in the church after midnight and began the solemn celebration, the soldiers surrounded the church and would not permit anyone to leave. The emperor's envoy entered the church and announced to the Christians the emperor's command that they immediately offer sacrifices to the idols or be burned alive. Then the archdeacon, a heroic soldier of Christ, inflamed with divine zeal began to encourage the people, reminding the faithful of the Three Children in the furnace in Babylon. "Behold, brethren," he said, "the table of oblation in the sanctuary of the Lord, and understand that our true Lord and God was just now sacrificed for us on it; should we not then lay down our lives for Him in this holy place?" The people were filled with zeal to die for Christ, and all the catechumens were baptized and chrismated. The soldiers then set fire to the church on all sides, and the Christians, twenty thousand of them in number, were burned in the flames while singing praises to God. The church burned for five days; and smoke with an intoxicating and wonderful fragrance rose from it. A certain marvelous, golden-rayed light manifested itself over this place. Thus, numerous men, women and children gloriously died and received the wreath of eternal glory in the Kingdom of Christ. They suffered and were glorified in the year 302.

2. THE VENERABLE SIMON, THE MYRRH-GUSHER

Simon was the founder of the Simonospetra Monastery on the Holy Mountain. He was glorified because of his asceticism, visions and miracles. He entered peacefully into rest and went to Christ in the year 1257.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR DOMNA

Domna was a virgin and priestess of the foul idols at the court of Emperor Maximian. Reading the Acts of the Apostles, which she had obtained from somewhere, she came to believe in Christ and was baptized by Bishop Cyril in Nicomedia, together with the eunuch Indes. St. Cyril directed her to a convent, where Blessed Agatha was the abbess. When the emperor began to search for her, Agatha dressed her in men's clothing and sent her to a men's monastery. This was at the time when twenty thousand Christians were burned in the church by Emperor Maximian. Immediately after this, by the emperor's command, Saints Indes, Gorgonius and Peter were thrown into the sea with millstones around their necks; Commander Zeno, who had openly denounced the emperor for his idolatry, was beheaded; St. Theophilus, the deacon of Bishop Anthimus, was slain by stoning and by arrows; Abbess Agatha, the nun Theophila and the nobles Dorotheus, Mardonius, Migdonius and Euthymius were also slain for the sake of Christ. One night, Domna was walking along the seashore and saw fishermen casting their nets into the sea. At that time she was especially grieving for St. Indes. Called by the fishermen to help them, she assisted them and by God's providence drew out three human bodies in the net. Domna recognized in them Saints Indes, Gorgonius and Peter, and she took their bodies and reverently buried them. When the emperor learned that a young man was caring for and tending the graves of the Christian martyrs, he ordered that the young man be beheaded. Thus, St. Domna was seized and beheaded, and she was crowned with the wreath of glory in the Heavenly Kingdom with the other martyrs.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE TWENTY THOUSAND HOLY MARTYRS OF NICOMEDIA

Holy Martyrs, your sufferings have passed,
Your tears wiped away, your wounds healed.
But more suffering still comes, it has not all arrived
Upon God's Church and upon her faithful.
Holy Martyrs, to you we pray:
By your prayers, watch over the Church.
Holy Martyrs, wonderful conquerors,
Against you have risen all the diabolical legions.
As great soldiers, you were without fear;
Your adversaries fell into the abyss.
You now clearly behold the Holy Trinity;
In His light you rejoice.
Holy Martyrs, we praise you for your wounds,
And for your tears and for your pure blood.
You became a fortress of defense for the Church.
Pray for us to the Savior Christ,
To make us worthy to call you brothers,
O honorable knights, children of grace!

REFLECTION

A story of the Divine Christ-child: When the Most-holy Virgin, with her Divine Child and the righteous Joseph, drew near to the city of Hermopolis [Cairo], they saw a tree before the gate of the city. The travelers from afar were weary from their journey and approached this tree to rest a while, even though the tree was very tall and did not offer adequate shade. The Egyptians called this tree "Persea" and worshiped it as a god, for they believed that some divinity was hidden in the tree. In reality, an evil spirit dwelt in this tree. As the holy family approached the tree, the tree shook fiercely, and the evil spirit, terrified by the approaching Christ-child, fled. Then the tree bent its top down to the ground and worshiped its Creator like a rational creature. Thus the bent tree cast a great shadow, under which the weary travelers rested. From that day, the tree received miraculous healing powers from Christ the Lord to heal every infirmity of men. Afterward, the holy sojourners went to the village of Matarea. Near the village they saw a fig tree, and, while Joseph went into the village on business, the Most-holy Virgin took refuge under the fig tree with the Lord. And, oh, what a miracle: the tree lowered its crown down to the ground to create a shadow for the travelers, and its lower half split open in such a way that the Mother with the Child could enter and rest. And what is even more miraculous: a living spring of water suddenly opened up near the fig tree. Joseph found a hut in the vicinity, where they settled. There they lived and drank water from that miraculous spring. This was the only spring of living water to be found in Egypt, for all the other water in Egypt comes from the Nile River, which branches off into innumerable canals. And thus, like brought forth like: the Lord Jesus, the Immortal and Heavenly Spring of living water, by His presence called forth this spring of living water from the earth.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the assembly of Christ's holy martyrs:

1. How they endured sufferings and did not deny Christ;
2. How, out of love for Christ the Lord, they went to their sufferings and death as if to a feast;
3. How they now rejoice in the Kingdom of Christ and help us by their prayers.

HOMILY

-on the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos-

His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it (John 2:5).

Here is joy for all the faithful: she who is closest to Christ the Savior in heaven, as she had been on earth, cares for the faithful, appears to them, helps them and advises them, **Whatsoever** He, my Son and my God, **saith unto you, do it**. Thus, she advised the servants at the marriage in Cana, and the servants obeyed her and saw a miracle. From those few words of the Most-holy Virgin, God's Bride, recorded in the Gospel, we receive a precious instruction, truly the one and only Gospel instruction that she gave to mankind during her life on earth. **Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it!** As though she wanted to say: "He knows all; He can do all; He loves you all; therefore, you should look neither here nor there, but hear Him and obey Him." She comprehended the responsibility in this world of living for Him and directing others to Him as the Source of life, and she voluntarily continues carrying out this responsibility even from heaven. Throughout the Church's entire history, she has taught the faithful to do whatsoever He said. And even today, from her heavenly glory, she mystically descends among the faithful to counsel them to do that which He has commanded. That is her Gospel-the Gospel of the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos. It consists not of the Four Gospels but of four words: **Do whatsoever He saith**. O my brethren, let us obey her! Let us obey her as a mother and more than our mother, for she desires the greatest good for us-to reign in the Eternal Kingdom of her Son.

O Most-holy Virgin, help us to fulfill His words.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

1. THE FOURTEEN THOUSAND HOLY CHILDREN OF BETHLEHEM

When the Magi from the east did not return to Jerusalem from Bethlehem to inform Herod about the newborn King but rather, at the angel's command, returned to their homeland another way, Herod became as enraged as a wild beast and ordered all the children two years old and under in Bethlehem and its surroundings to be killed. This frightening command of the king was carried out to the letter. His soldiers beheaded some of the children with swords, smashed others against stones, trampled others underfoot, and strangled others with their hands. And the cries and wails of the mothers rose to heaven, **Lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children (Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew 2:18)**, as had been prophesied. This crime against the multitude of innocent children was carried out a year after the birth of Christ, at the time when Herod was seeking to find the Divine Child. He asked Zacharias about his son John, so that he might kill him, since he naturally thought that John was the new king. As Zacharias did not turn John over, he was slain in the Temple by order of Herod. St. Simeon the God-receiver would also have been murdered soon after the Presentation in the Temple, had he not already reposed in God. After murdering the children of Bethlehem, Herod turned against the Jewish elders who had revealed to him where the Messiah would be born. He then killed Hyrcanes, the high priest, and the seventy elders of the Sanhedrin. Thus, they who had agreed with Herod that the new Child-king must be killed came to an evil end. After that, Herod murdered his brother, sister, wife and three sons. Finally, God's punishment came to him: he began to tremble, his legs became swollen, the lower part of his body became putrid, and worms came out of the sores; his nose became blocked and an unbearable stench emanated from him. Before his last breath, he remembered that there were many captive Jews in prison, and he ordered that they all be killed so that they would not rejoice in his death. Thus, this terrible ruler gave up his inhuman soul and handed it over to the devil for eternal possession.

2. THE VENERABLE MARCELLUS

Marcellus was from Apamea in Syria. He was the abbot of the Community of the Sleepless Ones in Constantinople. He was clairvoyant, and was a healer and great miracle-worker. He spoke with angels and easily defeated demons and drove them out. After his death, Marcellus appeared to St. Lucian, a member of his community, and told Lucian that he had implored God to take him into the Heavenly Kingdom soon. This holy and glorious man entered into rest in the year 486.

3. THE VENERABLE MARK THE GRAVE-DIGGER AND THEOPHILUS THE WEEPER

Mark and Theophilus were monks of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves. St. Mark possessed so much grace that he commanded the dead and they obeyed him: Mark sent word to inform a dead monk, who had already been washed and over whom the funeral service had been read, "Wait until tomorrow, Brother, for your grave is not yet ready," and the monk opened his eyes and remained alive until the following day. Theophilus wept constantly for his sins, pouring the tears he shed into a basin. Before his death, an angel appeared to him and showed him a larger basin filled with tears. These were Theophilus's tears, which had fallen to the ground, or had been wiped away with his hand, or had dried on his face. Thus, even in heaven they know and keep all our tears as well as our sufferings, labors and sighs for the sake of our salvation. These holy servants of God rested in the eleventh century and entered the Kingdom of Christ.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE FOURTEEN THOUSAND HOLY CHILDREN OF BETHLEHEM

A voice in Rama was heard, and much weeping,
And sorrowful mothers crying out to God.
In blood lay the slaughtered children,
And, over them, sorrowful mothers lamented.
The city of David, with all the surrounding region, moans;
Heaven was horrified at the misdeed of men;
Heaven and earth were horrified and quaked,
When the screams of the innocent pierced the air.
The blow intended for the Son of God
Fell with its weight on the innocent children,
Upon young and helpless ones of the same age as Christ.
The servants of the wicked king attacked
Where the angels of God sang
And where Christ's shepherds humbly knelt.
There a torrent of blood flowed.
Why? In order that Herod would always be first!
As soon as the Eternal Physician appeared on earth,
The earth revealed its wounds and sins,
Showing how much mankind is infected,
And how necessary healing from heaven is.
Upon the young forerunners of His suffering,
Christ bestowed the eternal joy of Paradise.

REFLECTION

A story about the Most-pure Virgin Mary: She conceived the Lord Jesus on a Friday, just as His passion was on a Friday, and she gave birth to Him on the first day of the week. On the first day of the week God said, **Let there be light (Genesis 1:3)**; on the first day of the week, manna fell from heaven; on this day the Lord and Savior was born; and on this day He was baptized in the Jordan. At that time, there lived in Bethlehem the aged Salome, a kinswoman of Joseph and Mary. She was unable to receive her kinfolk at her house but visited them in the shepherd's cave. When the Most-holy Virgin immaculately gave birth to the Lord and Savior, Salome came to visit her. She was amazed that such a young girl could give birth without the aid of a midwife, swaddle the Child herself, and beside all of that still be on her feet. When it was explained to Salome that this birth was of God and not man, that it was immaculate and without pain, and that the Virgin Mother remained a Virgin after birth as she was before birth, Salome did not believe it, but rather she stretched out her hand to the body of the Most-holy Virgin to examine it, after the custom of a midwife, and to find out if this was indeed so. And because of her unbelief and insolence, a punishment befell her: her hand was seized and withered. The aged woman was greatly frightened by the miracle and lamented over her withered hand. However, when she touched the Divine Child later, her hand was restored to health like it was before. Thus, Salome believed in the virginity of the Most-pure Virgin Mary and in the Divinity of Christ. Thus after forty days, when according to custom the Most-pure Virgin came with the young Child to the Temple in Jerusalem, Zacharias the high priest placed her in the area reserved for virgins. The Pharisees and priests were disturbed by this and wanted to remove her to the place reserved for married women, but the discerning Zacharias did not allow this, claiming, that she was a virgin even though she had given birth. Because of this, the Jewish elders hated Zacharias and sought from Herod that he be killed. Immediately after she left the Temple, the Theotokos and Joseph left from Jerusalem to Nazareth and then to Egypt.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the assembly of the holy hierarchs and teachers of the Church:

1. How they zealously preached the Gospel and shepherded the flock of Christ;
2. How they confirmed the devout Faith and trampled heresies;
3. How they now rejoice in the Kingdom of Christ and help us by their prayers.

HOMILY

-on the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos-

Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also (Luke 2:35).

Who on this earth could even closely compare with the Lord in patient endurance of suffering except His Most-holy Mother? The elder Simeon, adorned with snowy hair like a white swan, prophetically foresaw her future sufferings and likened those sufferings to a sword piercing her soul. One sword had pierced her soul when the righteous Joseph doubted her at the time of her pregnancy; the second, when she had to flee to Egypt before Herod's sword; and the third, fourth and many, many others when she saw the hatred and intrigues of the Jewish elders against her Son day in and day out during the whole time of His preaching and miracle-working among men. But the sharpest sword pierced her soul when she stood beneath the Cross of her Son and Lord. This sword was foreseen and prophesied to her by the holy, aged Simeon. Majestic and moving was her silence, beneath which she covered all her pains and all the wounds of her heart as with a veil. In the twilight, all these countless pains that had accumulated in her most pure heart shone as an inextinguishable flame of faith and hope in God and dedication to God. This handmaid of the Lord, unsurpassable in nobility! She saw herself clearly in God's plan for the salvation of mankind; she read about herself in the prophets; she spoke with the angels-God's messengers. Therefore, all that came upon her, joy or pain, she knew came from God. She was not jubilant in her joy nor did she murmur in her pain, but rather she remained silent and laid it all up in her heart.

O Most-holy Virgin Theotokos, help us that we may be, like thee, submissive to the will of God.

To thy Son and Lord, through thee, be glory and praise forever. Amen.

1. THE HOLY MARTYR ANYSIA

Anysia was born in Thessalonica of eminent and wealthy parents and was brought up in the Christian Faith. She was orphaned at an early age and gave herself completely to godly thoughts and prayer in her own home. Fervent in her love for Christ, she often said: "Oh, how false is the life of youth, for you either scandalize or are scandalized. Better is old age; but sorrow overcomes me because of the length of time that separates me from heaven." She sold all her possessions, distributed the proceeds to the poor, and lived from the labors of her own hands. She kept a strict fast, slept very little, and constantly shed tears at prayer. When sleep overcame her she would say to herself: "It is dangerous to sleep while my enemy keeps vigil." At that time, the wicked Emperor Maximian issued a decree that anyone could kill Christians when and where he encountered them, without trial or sentence. This holy virgin once went out into the streets to attend church. That day was a pagan feast of the sun. A soldier saw her beautiful countenance, and he approached her with an impure desire, asking for her name. She made the sign of the Cross and said to him: "I am Christ's handmaid, and I am going to church." When the impudent soldier came closer and began to speak to her insanely, she shoved him away and spat in his face. The soldier struck her with his sword below the ribs and ran her through. This holy virgin suffered in the year 298. She was honorably buried by Christians and was crowned with the wreath of glory by God in the Heavenly Kingdom. A church was built over her grave.

2. THE VENERABLE THEODORA OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Theodora was a nun and servant of St. Basil the New (March 26). After her death, she appeared to St. Gregory, a disciple of Basil, and described for him all twenty toll-houses through which her soul had passed until, through the prayers of St. Basil, she had entered into eternal rest. Theodora presented herself to the Lord on December 30, 940.

3. THE HOLY APOSTLE TIMON

Timon was one of the Seven Deacons and one of the Seventy Apostles (**Acts 6:5**). He was appointed Bishop of Bostra in Arabia. There he preached the Gospel and endured much ill-treatment at the hands of the pagans. He was thrown into fire but remained unharmed. He finally died, being crucified, and entered into the Kingdom of Christ.

4. THE VENERABLE THEODORA OF CAESAREA

After many ascetic labors in the convent of St. Anna, she entered peacefully into rest in the year 755.

5. THE VENERABLE MARTYR GIDEON

Gideon was a Greek by birth, of very poor parents. In his youth he was forced to embrace Islam. Repentant, he fled to the Holy Mountain, where he received the monastic tonsure in the Monastery of Karakallou. Desiring martyrdom for Christ, he received the blessing of his spiritual father and returned to the same place where he had become a Moslem. There, before the Turks, he openly confessed the Christian Faith and denounced Mohammed as a false prophet. The Turks shaved his head, placed him upside-down on a donkey, and led him through the town, but he rejoiced at this ridicule for the sake of Christ. They then chopped off all his fingers and toes with an axe, as they had once done to St. James the Persian (November 27). Finally they threw him into a place filled with excrement, where he gave up his holy soul to God in the year 1818, in Trnovo in Thrace. His miracle-working relics are preserved in the Church of the Holy Apostles in the village of Trnovo, and a part of his relics can be found in the Karakallou Monastery.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HOLY MARTYR ANYSIA

Holy Anysia prays to God,
Continually kneeling and shedding tears:
"O Jesus, God and Lord,
The Source of eternal life,
The Treasury of incorruptible goods:
Help me, O God, help me,
To remain a virgin until death,
As a virgin to enter into rest,
And to become worthy of Thy Kingdom.
Grant me, O Savior, Thy grace,
To be able to suffer for Thee,
To sacrifice myself for Thee.
I desire to be a sacrifice to my God-
Oh, help me to gain what I desire!"
God heard the virgin Anysia,
And gave her His grace
To be able to suffer for Him.
Holy Anysia, now in Paradise,
Shines as a star among the stars,
Shines as an angel among the angels,
Praying for us to the Immortal Christ.

REFLECTION

Here are two more examples of how the Merciful God helps those in misfortune who hope in Him with faith. Blessed Theodora of Caesarea was born into a noble house and then entrusted to the Convent of St. Anna for her education. There Theodora was not only educated but also lived a life of asceticism, preparing herself to receive the monastic tonsure. Emperor Leo the Isaurian took her from the convent by force and betrothed her to one of his commanders. Theodora protested this marriage with all her soul, but was as powerless as a lamb in the paws of a wolf. She lamented and prayed constantly in her heart to God that He would not forsake her. On the day of the marriage, while the guests were feasting, news unexpectedly came to the emperor that the Scythians had attacked his empire. The emperor ordered his commander to go out immediately against the Scythians. The commander went and never returned, for he was killed in battle. Thus, by God's help, St. Theodora was freed. As a pure maiden she returned to her convent, where she received the monastic tonsure and, as a nun, became famous for her rare asceticism.

A second example: In the Monastery of the "Sleepless Ones," there was great want during a year of famine. St. Marcellus, the abbot, received some poor men one day, refreshed them, and then wanted to give them some money for their journey. Marcellus asked the steward of the monastery how much money they had altogether. The steward told him they had ten silver coins. The abbot ordered that all ten silver coins be given to these poor men. However, the steward did not give them all ten; instead he gave them nine and kept one for the needs of the monastery. The steward was very concerned about the monastery, for it was in extreme poverty. A rich man suddenly visited the monastery and brought the abbot ninety talents of gold. Then the discerning Marcellus summoned the steward and said to him: "Behold, God wanted to send us one hundred talents through this devout man, but because you disobeyed me and withheld one silver coin, the Provider of all deprived us of ten talents."

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the assembly of ascetics and virgins, both male and female:

1. How they, out of love for Christ, renounced everything and gave themselves up to voluntary suffering;
2. How they conquered themselves, the world and the devil by their persevering endurance;
3. How they now rejoice in the Kingdom of Christ and help us by their prayers.

HOMILY

-on the Kingdom of the saints-

But the saints of the most High shall take the Kingdom and possess the Kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever (Daniel 7:18).

Abased and oppressed in the kingdoms of the world, the saints will reign eternally in the Kingdom of Heaven. The last on earth, they will rejoice as the first in heaven. Hungry, thirsty, barefoot and naked in the transitory kingdoms, they will be like king's sons, satisfied and clothed in royal raiment in the enduring Kingdom. Strangers in the kingdoms of decay, they will be lords in their Kingdom, the Kingdom of Incorruption. This is the final Kingdom; in truth, the only kingdom that can be called a kingdom. All others are transitory, temporary schools of deceit and vanity. For the Eternal Kingdom, the saints were recruited on earth from the citizens of all earthly kingdoms through the ages. They are the sons and daughters of Christ the Savior, the children of the Living God. They are those who have passed from this life to the other life and who now reign. But all the splendor and all the majesty of their reign has not yet been revealed. This will be displayed after the Second Coming of Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead. Then will all the splendor and all the majesty of the Kingdom of the saints be shown. This is the Eternal Kingdom of Christ our God. Of this Kingdom there will be neither change nor end **for ever, even for ever and ever.**

O Lord Jesus, the Builder of the Kingdom of the saints, have mercy on us sinners and prepare us for the Eternal Kingdom of Thy saints.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

1. THE VENERABLE MELANIA THE ROMAN

Melania was born in Rome of devout and very wealthy parents. She was forced by them to enter into marriage with a young nobleman, Apinianus. She became gravely ill in giving birth to her second child, and she told her husband that she would be healed only if he vowed before God to live with her in the future as a brother with a sister. Her husband vowed, and Melania, out of spiritual joy, was physically restored to health. When it was pleasing to God to take both of their children to Himself, they decided to sell all their possessions and distribute the proceeds to the poor, the churches and the monasteries. They traveled through many lands and cities, doing good works everywhere with their wealth. They visited famous spiritual fathers in Upper and Lower Egypt, learned much and were inspired by them. During that entire time, Melania lived an ascetic life of strict fasting, fervent prayer, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures. Melania had the custom of reading the entire book of the Holy Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, three times every year. She lived with her husband as with a brother and fellow-ascetic. Coming to Alexandria, they received the blessing of the Patriarch, St. Cyril. After that, they traveled to Jerusalem and settled on the Mount of Olives. There Melania closed herself off and devoted herself to divine contemplation, fasting and prayer. Thus, she lived for fourteen years, after which she came out to help others to salvation. She founded a monastery for men and a convent for women. At the invitation of her kinsman, Senator Volusian, a pagan, she went to Constantinople and converted him to the Christian Faith (which even Blessed Augustine himself was unable to do). She then returned to the Mount of Olives, where she presented herself to God in the year 439 at the age of fifty-seven.

2. THE HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS JOSEPH, KING DAVID, AND JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD

They are all commemorated on the Sunday after the Nativity of Christ. One can learn all about King David, the son of Jesse, in the Book of Kings, and for St. James see October 23. Joseph the Righteous is called in the Gospel a **righteous man (Matthew 1:19)**, and because of this God designated him to protect the Most-holy Virgin and imparted to him great honor in the plan of the salvation of mankind. Although Joseph was of the royal lineage of David, he was a humble carpenter in Nazareth. At the age of eighty, he took to himself the Most-holy Virgin from the Temple in Jerusalem into his home. He entered into rest at the age of 110.

3. THE VENERABLE MARTYR ZOTICUS, THE FEEDER OF ORPHANS (BENEFactor OF THE POOR)

Zoticus was eminent both in birth and in rank. He moved to Constantinople, rejected all worldly things, and received ordination to the priesthood. He founded a home for the poor, in which he housed those who had contagious diseases and ministered to them. He was a personal acquaintance of Emperor Constantine the Great. Because of the gold Zoticus had received from the emperor and had spent on the victims of disease, Constantine's son Constantius had him tied to a wild ass, which was driven until St. Zoticus died of his wounds. He suffered in the fourth century.

4. THE BLESSED THEOPHYLACT, ARCHBISHOP OF OHRID

Theophylact was born on the island of Euripos and educated in Constantinople by the most eminent teachers of that time. As a priest of the Great Church, he was chosen bishop and sent, against his will, to Ohrid, where he remained about twenty-five years (from about 1082 to 1108). Chromatianus of Ohrid calls him "the wisest archbishop." A man of enormous learning, both secular and theological, of refined Byzantine tastes, melancholy and sensitive, Theophylact felt among the Slavs in Ohrid like an exile among barbarians. He wrote commentaries on the Four Gospels and other books of the New Testament. These are the best works of their kind after that of St. Chrysostom, and are read even today with great benefit. His other known works include his Letters and the Life of St. Clement of Ohrid. In old age, St. Theophylact withdrew from Ohrid to Thessalonica, where it is thought he finished his earthly life and took up his habitation in blessed eternity.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE VENERABLE MELANIA THE ROMAN

The wealthy Melania possessed great gold.
She gave it to the poor, for the sake of Christ and her salvation.
He who trades wisely receives great value from his gold,
And with it quickly purchases the Heavenly Kingdom.
Melania, a devout woman, became poor;
She possessed nothing in the world except the Living God,
And without gold-but with the Living God-she became wealthy.
Melania said: "God alone is enough!"
Melania the physician healed pains,
Praising God until her last breath.

REFLECTION

How wisely holy men and women knew how to handle their wealth! How skillfully they purchased the eternal goods of heaven with their earthly goods. Oh, how little they valued earthly goods in themselves-as dust and smoke! When St. Melania visited the holy desert fathers in Egypt with the intention of giving them some financial help, she was astonished at seeing their extreme abhorrence of goods and riches. Thus, she visited one hermit, Ephesion, and saw nothing in his cell but mats, a bowl for water, a little dry bread, and a salt pot. Knowing beforehand that the elder would not take any gold from her, she seized the opportunity and placed several gold pieces in the salt pot. However, when she was on her way back, she heard the elder running after her, and at the top of his voice he was calling to her to stop. She stopped. The elder held the gold pieces in the palm of his hand and, handing them to Melania, said: "I do not need this, take what is yours!" Melania said to him: "If you do not need it, give it to someone else." He replied: "No one in this place has any use for it." When Melania refused to accept the gold, the elder swung his arm and threw the gold pieces into the river and then returned to his cell.

During an outbreak of plague in Constantinople, Emperor Constantius ordered that everyone infected be immediately thrown into the sea. St. Zoticus ransomed those who were infected and brought them to his home, and there he cared for them. When his money ran out, he went to the emperor and asked for money to purchase precious pearls for him. The emperor gave him money, and with this money Zoticus continued his work of ransoming the contagious ones and caring for them. One day, the emperor asked Zoticus for the promised pearls, and Zoticus brought him and showed him the infected men in his home, saying: "These, O Emperor, are the living pearls that I acquired with labor and money for your salvation." The enraged emperor condemned Zoticus to death, but Zoticus entered into eternal life, and the emperor remained to atone and repent for his sins.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the assembly of penitents:

1. How they sinned, unknowingly or knowingly, against the Law of Christ;
2. How they repented, corrected their lives and fulfilled the Law of Christ;
3. How they now rejoice in Christ's Kingdom and help us by their prayers.

HOMILY

-on the victory of the Lamb-

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them (Revelation 17:14).

Brethren, let us rejoice and be glad at the Lamb's victory over all the beasts. Lions and tigers, wolves and foxes, hyenas and snakes-the Lamb shall overcome them! Who has seen and heard this? Our ears have heard this and our eyes have seen this. The Lamb is Christ the Lord, and the beasts are all His adversaries, visible and invisible. In our day the Lamb carries the victories; in the future the Lamb shall conquer, even to the last day. The Lamb conquered and conquers and shall conquer all the kings and rulers of the world with their bestial natures, their armies and their mercenaries, their glorifiers and their followers. Such power is possessed by the meek Lamb of God. O my poor brethren, be not afraid; be not frightened; be not doubtful. The greatest Victor is your Leader, your Helper and your Friend. He is called "the Lamb" in order to teach us that we should be like lambs: quiet, meek, guileless, patient, ready for the victory-bearing sacrifice, and devoted to the will of our Shepherd. When God is with the lamb, then the lamb is stronger than the wolf, mightier than the lion, craftier than the snake and the fox. However, justice cannot be recognized or the final victory be seen until both worlds are taken into account. O my brethren, when we take into account both worlds, we recognize eternal justice and immortal victory. The Lamb conquers, and only the Lamb.

O Lord Jesus, King of kings, Victor in all conflicts and battles, the Lamb of God, meek and merciful, make us to be victory-bearing lambs.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

The end and glory be to God!

Through the prayers of all Thy saints,

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us! Amen.